

**ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY**

TITLE THE THESIS

**THE TENSION BETWEEN AFRICAN AND WESTERN PHILOSOPHY:
CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES OF RECLAIMING RATIONALITY
(FOR AFRICA)**

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ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY

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Introduction

The name “African philosophy” comprises two independent but complementary terms: “African” and “philosophy”. To understand the meaning of African philosophy, therefore, it is highly important to define each term separately and to bring together to make sense of what they give us in connection. In fact, both terms cannot be given clear-cut definition for they are used in different contexts. But, what I can think of African philosophy is that, as it is also for Bruce Janz, the term “Africa” answers the “where” of objective tasks of philosophizing. Accordingly, African philosophy just like American philosophy, Indian philosophy or European philosophy is understood in connection to historico-political and sociocultural realities of African continent. This realities are through which we may understand and examine questions, contents and scopes of African philosophy. As we will see in the coming chapters, one important issue without which one may not understand the nature of African philosophy debate is historico-political either/or between Africa and Europe. This tension emerged as a result of Western discourses on Africa on the one hand and African response to those discourses on the other. Here, my purpose is to critically examine this tension in line with pertinent issues in the African philosophy, specifically rationality debate. What is central to ‘rationality debate’ is ambivalent and ambiguous concept of reason which Europeans historically and systematically used to justify their wish that only the Occident segment of humanity has a prior, superior and exclusive right to reason(rationality).

Western discourses on Africa, therefore, are endorsing the idea that only Europeans are exclusively human and rational by defining non-Western people in general and African people in particular as subhuman and irrational. African responses as a result emerged to refute and reject these derogatory ideas of Western discourse and said to be the anti-thesis of the Eurocentric ideas. For this reason, I will try to provide and discuss the arguments of racist European scholars such as Hegel, Imanuel Kant, David Hume and other colonial narratives on the one hand and African response on the other. Furthermore, as far as my concern is African philosophy, I will provide and insightfully discuss the nature of African responses. In the first place, I will consider the works of Afrocentric scholars who are arguing from historical points of view such as Martin Bernal, Cheick Anta Diop, Henry Olela, and George James. Although rejected by Eurocentric scholars such as Mary Lifkowitz as pseudo-history, these works for me are not only responses to

European discourses, but also are texts describing history of African thought system. Additionally, I will critically examine the works of contemporary African scholars such as Paulin Hountondji, Mogobe B. Ramose, Tsenay Serequeberhan, Messay Kebede and others. In fact, African scholars are engaged in so many critical issues. Above all, it is true that every scholar is searching for the way out of those problems and attempt to tackle the continuity of European injurious legacies. Nevertheless, it is evident that the African philosophy debate has continued as it is influenced by European legacy either directly or indirectly. Accordingly, the debate held among philosophic schools such as; ethnophilosophy, professional school, philosophic sagacity and hermeneutic approach to African philosophy shows as if most African scholars are bounded by one or more ideas of Western philosophy. Thus, the question about African philosophy in general and rationality claim in particular is reluctantly oscillated between different points of view so that their approach is said to be paradoxical. Consequently, insofar as the concern of this thesis is the rationality claim, I will suggest alternative ways from my own understanding. Accordingly, the first and general alternative through which we may avoid previous paradoxes is following revolutionary approach both in deconstructing European from self-appointed standards of rationality and in exploring African form of rationality. For this, therefore, it is indispensable to redefine philosophy from the African historicity and cultural realities. So doing this, we may be able to reaffirm reason (rationality) at the abstract level and then concretize it.

Chapter One

Issues Underlying African Philosophy

In this chapter, I will expose and discuss the concept ‘African philosophy’ and issues related to it. This is because, the very nature of African philosophy is not clear for most of us. For this reason, I decided to introduce pertinent issues in and on African philosophy. Hence, I will present four sub-topics which I thought will help interested readers understand the nature, challenges and topics of African philosophy. These sub-topics can also advance their understanding of issues under discussion and justify the legitimacy of topics in the coming chapters.

1.1 Defining African Philosophy

When the name “African philosophy” is mentioned, many questions and problems arise with it. If other issues are temporarily set aside, it is important to be clear with the meaning of the concept “African” and “philosophy”. The problem is not because these concepts are ambiguous and need to be defined, but the name “African philosophy” is fundamentally determined by the very definition of what it means to be “African” and “philosophy”. It is obvious that, “Africa” is a geographic designation, while “philosophy” cannot be defined as easily as the former one. Indeed, the definition of philosophy is mostly determined by the practitioners’ intent and areas of emphasis. For a moment, let us look at some suggestions and comments on the name “African philosophy”. For some African scholars, the name African philosophy is perfect; thereby the issues under emphasis have to be geographical, for geographical implication cannot entirely be left out of the subject. For example, Hountondji argued that “the subject being African philosophy cannot exclude a geographical location (1983, 64). He even excludes the works of non-African from the domain, as he asserted that: “a work like Bantu philosophy does not belong to African philosophy, since its author is not African” (Ibid). Moreover, Azenabor stressing the issue of language in doing African philosophy, argued that “Bantu philosophy was not written in an African language but in Dutch, and so it is said not to qualify as African philosophy” (2000, 233). For other scholars, the name “African philosophy” by itself is problematic, because it excludes black people in the diaspora and others who are living outside the continent. For this group, the emphasis should entirely be black personality without reference to geographical

location. Moreover, others do not bother about the ‘naming’ and the backgrounds of the authors insofar as the content is Africa’s philosophic issue. What matters most for this group is the subject and the role those works play in developing African philosophy.

Before talking about the history, nature, or any other issues of African philosophy, it is pivotal to define and understand what philosophy is. Defining philosophy has remained a perpetual philosophical problem, thus, there is no consensus about the exact meaning of philosophy. Instead, many scholars prefer to describe what the tasks of philosophizing essentially encompass. For this reason, defining African philosophy has been a difficult. Accordingly, it is said to be the description of philosophic discourse that African scholars are used to define African philosophy. As Sogolo puts it, “the controversy over what constitutes an African philosophy tends to dominate sometimes so much that it forms almost the entire content of the course” (quoted in Oyeshile, 2008: 57). Consequently, in defining African philosophy, the main controversy is not about the conceptual meaning of the discourse, but it is about the description of the discourse and issues encompassed. For Tsenay, philosophy is all about “a reflexive and reflective discourse on the actuality of lived hitorico-cultural and political milieu” (1994: 2). Accordingly, African philosophy for him has to be hermeneutical which is grounded in and on the actuality of post-colonial situation of Africa. For P. Hountondji, however, “philosophy is simply a theoretical discipline which like any other can develop only in the form of literature” (1984: 68). In this case, African philosophy for him can exist and develop only in the form of literature. Moreover, for Masolo, “philosophy is experience and African philosophy must be born out of its own peculiar cultural circumstances combined with a living and constructive zeal amongst individual African intellectuals to understand and explain the world around them” (1994:251). Although, these names can be used as examples, it is also possible to mention others who are described African philosophy differently. But, what is required to be noted is that, each scholar defines hence describes what he/she thought should be the nature and characteristics of philosophy in order to define African philosophy.

From the definition offered, therefore, we can understand that the main challenges of defining African philosophy one way or the other are related with those problems of philosophic inquiry in general. Thus, African philosophy is understood in two main characteristics of philosophic inquiry: as a set of reflective practices rooted in particular culture and as a discipline in

universities. In the former sense, some set of philosophers argued that African philosophy exists in African traditions, and the philosopher's task should entirely be a critical explication of those traditions. In the second sense, another set argued that there can be no philosophy without disciplinary structures. For this group, African philosophy is recent and derivative. Furthermore, although defining philosophy by itself is problematic, we can say that it is more challenging in the African context. For example, Lansana Keita stated this difficulty arguing that "the questions concerning the definition of philosophy are even more problematic in African philosophy" (Keita, 1991: 133). As a result, issues which are not really problems in Europe, or Asia can be found as severe problems in Africa. Above all, it is possible to mention the fact that African scholars still struggle with the detrimental implication of colonial discourses so as to understand and explain the African tradition. But, it is important for us to realize the fact that, the form of knowledge in African philosophy must be built up on understanding the relationship between two concepts: African and philosophy.

1.2 Challenges in African Philosophy

Frustration in African philosophy is said to be dynamic in its nature for the history of African philosophy has been the history of struggle with various controversies. Some problems, however, are related to the history of colonization while some others related with the late emergence of philosophy in African universities. Because of this, we can say that challenges in Africa are not as specific and simple as it is in Europe or Asia. Generally, those challenges are related to language, method, source, disciplinary structures and others. For the time being, let me present and discuss the problems of language and methodology. The claim to do African philosophy in African language is initiated following the twentieth century focus on language. This claim, however, is highly influenced by the works of analytic philosophers and radical phenomenologists such as Heidegger and Gadamer. Unlike analytic philosophy which tries to restrict the scope of philosophy to language analysis, for radical phenomenologists such as Heidegger and Gadamer, the issue of language cannot be seen isolated from the particular social and historical contexts. Consequently, language is assumed to be a key for understanding and is highly bound up with thinking and interpretation (Gadamer, 1975, 366). Most importantly, we can say that Heidegger's (in *Being and Time*) characterization of "dwelling" as the main feature of humanity influenced so many scholars to emphasize on the existential situation of human

being. In other words, phenomenological movement in general and individualities such as Heidegger and Gadamer in particular influenced the foundation of existential intellectual movement (Existentialism). Consequently, impressed by this intellectual movement some African scholars have attempted to emphasize on African languages. Even, some scholars such as (Barry Hallen 1997) and Kwami Gyekye attempted to locate African philosophy in the artifacts of language such as tales, proverbs, riddles, and so forth.

From this, therefore, we can understand that language is a tool and primary medium of understanding, teaching, and writing philosophical ideas. It is the vehicle by which philosophical ideas are being taught so that it plays a crucial role in the manner people think and understand. For this reason, the concern for the language of Africa is not less than studying the totality of African cultural values insofar as societal values reside in the language. Most importantly, language is said to be the characteristic feature that distinguishes people of different linguistic backgrounds, is the mark of people's essence and authenticity. It would seem then that, to teach, write and understand philosophy using an African language is but to make African philosophy genuine and authentic. It is along this line, that one scholar argued "philosophy is philology", while the other also enhances this arguing "flight from one's own language is the quickest shortcut to cultural alienation" (quoted in Azenaber, 2000: 323). Based on this, therefore, we can say that philosophizing in African language plays a significant role in exploring African ontology, epistemology, morality or cultural values in general. Regardless of this, Azenaber argued that "there can be no African philosophy until there is a philosophy in African language(s), not just a translation or interpretation" (2000: 322). In my opinion this argument is misleading, because insofar as European languages are being used as official language of most countries of Africa, and yet, all most all universities in Africa are using foreign language as a medium of instruction, is a wish which cannot be achieved. It seems then that, unless and otherwise African languages are utilized in education, especially in teaching philosophy, the demand of African philosophy in African language is surely unattainable.

The other problem of African philosophy is methodological questions, which can also be seen as the problem of philosophic inquiry in general. Because, methodological differences are mostly predetermined by the very definition of the term "philosophy" which can possibly imply the valuations of one method over the other. For this reason, it is uncommon to see methodological

controversies in philosophic discourse in general and African philosophy in particular. Keita stated this arguing “there is no consensus as to what methods of investigation are proper to philosophy and what topics should be of special research interest” (Keita 1991: 133). As an example for this, it is possible to state the incommensurability of philosophic research program in between “continental” and “analytical” philosophical traditions. Not only this, methodological difference can also be seen with in specific philosophic tradition; thereby individual scholars within one school and also different schools within the same tradition employing different method. In the African context, however, it is possible to argue that insofar as “the structures of African philosophical thought have been determined to a great extent by the ideological systems of beliefs imposed on Africa by European scholarship of the pre-colonial and postcolonial eras” (Ibid, P. 134), most schools in African philosophy are seen adopting one of the research program in Western Philosophy. Apart from disciplinary dispute, African scholars are arguing on the importance of appropriating one method over the other. This critique is essentially a comparative evaluation with Western methodologies which are said to be used as normative standards. For this reason, it is obvious that philosophy departments in most African universities model the styles of disciplinary methodology of Western philosophy. Despite this, it is also true that most African scholars are clearly propounding philosophical ideas of their mentor or their graduate school.

Furthermore, it is in connection to this that Bruce Janz warns hegemonic implication of mirroring methodological standards of Western philosophy. He argued that “If the method is Anglo-American analytic philosophy, African philosophy already comes subordinated to it, because it refers to another tradition as its arbiter” (Janz, 1997: 234). In fact, Janz is right for strict reliance on Western philosophy is all about replicating that particular method as it is. What has even been the long standing problem in African philosophy debate is nothing more than standardizing epistemic and methodological categories of the Occident tradition. As we will see in the coming chapter, African philosophy debate is reluctantly dichotomized and polarized in between essentialist (ethnophilosophy) and Universalist (professional school) for the long period of time. In fact, there are other approaches such as Oruka’s philosophic sagacity which possibly lie in between these two antagonistic points of view. In my opinion, appropriation is up to the business of African scholars in line with the concrete experience of African actuality. Neither of

the two approaches would be fruitful unless and other wise any theories appropriated are rooted in the African life world.

1.3 The either/or of Africa versus Europe and its Philosophical Implication

The other challenging task in African philosophy, which I believe need serious self-examination is the either/or between African and Western philosophy. As it is noted by African scholars such as Mudimbe, Messay, Masolo, Irele and others, historico-political encounters between Africa and Europe is the reason for the hitherto philosophical tension in between the two camps. Masolo while shortly presenting the history of African philosophy states, “the birth of the debate in African philosophy is historically associated with two related happenings: Western discourses on Africa, and the African response to it” (Masolo, 1994, 1). Mudimbe also elucidates that; “until now, Western interpreters as well as African analysts have been using categories and conceptual systems which depend on a Western epistemological order.” (Mudimbe, 1998, 10) He insists that, Africa is the product of western discourses used to justify their ideological programs by illustrating the power of knowledge. Furthermore, Abiola Irele also argued that “the encounter between Africa and Europe has brought about a conflict of cultures, a tension at the heart of the African system of values” (Irele, 1983, 9). According to Irele’s consideration, it is this tension which provided a constant subject of reflection for the intelligentsia. In addition, Ramose argued that “most discourses on Africa for centuries have been dominated by non-Africans and the possible reason for such state of affairs is unjustified violence of colonization” (2002, P. 1). The result, according to him, is Africa remains silent and westerners speak on behalf of the Africans and define the meaning of experience and truth.

Based on this scholars’ insight, however, what is very important for our purpose here is to critically examine Western discourses on Africa on the one hand and African responses on the other. For now, therefore, let me highlight the central ideas of European colonial discourses and African reaction. Accordingly, those Western discourses on Africa might give us the idea of Africa in the eyes of Europe. These discourses are mainly justifying western ideological programs, thereby neglecting Africans’ ability to think. They defended the claim that Africans in general and Black people in particular is incapable of producing knowledge. Consequently, what is central to colonial discourses on Africa is the equation of African society with backward culture, inferior race, and non-rational or irrational in their mentality. For example, Hegel who is

believed to be the pioneer of ant-black campaign stated “for the soul of man, God must be more than a thunderer, whereas among the Negroes this is not the case” (Hegel 2001, p. 112). Generally, European discourses promote and promulgate as only the occident humanity and rationality is objective and universal to all by defining non-Western people in general and African in particular as subhuman and irrational.

African responses, however, are all the attempts to refute and reject European biases, Prejudices and lies against Africa in general and black people in particular. Accordingly, African responses strongly reject European characterization of African legacy as ‘primitive’, of their thinking as ‘irrational’, and of their culture as backward. Indeed, some philosophers defend the view that, western discourses on Africa are the only results of colonization (hence, contrary to the reality in Africa). For most thinkers, it is only westerner’s justification of colonialism enunciating false belief about Africa. Since European discourses are standardizing their humanity, whatever is different from their model as a result is ‘primitive’, backward, non-rational or illogical. For this reason, African scholars such as Wiredu, Messay and Oruka are attacking European normativity and opt for the primacy of mental decolonization. According to Messay for example, “African philosophical views have emerged from the clear perception of the deep damages caused by the internalization of the colonial discourse” (2004: 163). For him, the best way to decolonize African mind is “the revival of tradition and the reconnection of Africans with the idea of a free pre-colonial Africa” (ibid). Messay, therefore, is arguing for the rehabilitation of precolonial African tradition which according to him can be used for rediscovering the idea of free Africa and at the same time relativize the Western model.

Moreover, some other scholars i.e. Mudimbe are in need of deconstructing conceptual and epistemological categories of Western philosophy with the aim of developing African epistemology out of Africa’s real identity and from the impartial bases. V.Y. Mudimbe, one of the best deconstructionist African scholars is arguing for the priority of deconstructing Western categories, illuminating the fact that “the conceptual framework of African thinking has been both a mirror and consequence of the experience of European hegemony” (Mudimbe 1988, p. 185). According to him, Modern African thoughts are the product of the West so that many concepts and categories underpinning ethnocentric view of African philosophy are inventions of the West. Not only ethnocentric view, he takes almost all works underlying the hitherto African

philosophy as a product of complex interaction with European styles. He stated that “the gnosis of African knowledge which is sometimes African by virtue of its authors and promoters, but which extends to a Western epistemological territory” (1988: 186). I think, Mudimbe clearly explains the motives and foundation of modern African thought.

From this, therefore, we can understand that there is in fact the tension between the two camps. As I have tried to highlight in previous paragraphs, Western discourses on Africa have no philosophic foundation. Consequently, it is legitimate for African scholars to refute those European fantasies, bias, illogical and groundless description of African mentality. Some works are insightful so as to amplify the progress of African philosophy. But, I can hardly accept that the inter play is dialogical, both in between African scholars themselves and between Africa and Europe. Some works sounds as if meant for ideological self-defense than for undertaking philosophical investigation. In fact, it is possible to run both philosophy and ideology side by side, even together. Undeniably, European philosophical experiences also show as if some works have been aimed for ideological purposes. And still, some philosophical works can also be ideologies while some ideologies make us attain philosophical values. Despite all these possibilities, I believe African philosophy must be founded before it meant for ideological reasons. For this reason, I think it is the right time to look back to our tradition and critically approach our previous philosophical works. Western discourses on Africa and about Africa however are originated for ideological reasons, and geared towards achieving some ideologies to the extent of denying African humanity. Based on these discourses, some responses attempted to rediscover African tradition in order to challenge and reveal what they supposed the foundation of true history, thought, culture and knowledge of Africa, which by themselves are revealed and found untrue and problematic. As it is explained by Mudimbe, such attempt by itself is problematic because it was meant to fit Western epistemological standards. Accordingly, as far as my understanding is concerned neither ideological goals nor fitting Western epistemological standards can be the foundation of African philosophy, but addressing problems within. In my opinion, therefore, African philosophical discourse should ultimately look for the creative path, or the way out of such controversies. Its taxonomies should fundamentally be a search for alternative ways of enhancing philosophical insight.

Generally, it is an undeniable truth that the history of colonialism is the multi-faceted history of oppression, the European form of philosophy has been replicated in Africa. Not only in Africa, it is a form which is replicated everywhere in the world, thereof it is uncommon to see a philosophy that does not mirror western styles of philosophy. It is also true that, African philosophy as academic discipline is modeled on western forms of disciplinary methodology. This may be because; most African intellectuals are disciples of some European philosophers, or their own particular graduate schools. To be precise, African philosophies in twentieth century trace their heritage back to European forms of philosophy or inculcated by the graduate schools of particular African philosophers. This tendency, however, is not a problem by itself; it rather indicates African philosophy is inevitably a philosophy of cross cultural conversation and encounter. Thus, such conversation may create a condition for African philosophy to search for the creative path in Africa's perspective. Therefore, what matters most in present day African philosophic discourse is the readiness and orientation to address those problems through dialogue. It must have the readiness to inter into dialogue with any philosophical traditions as well as its own diverse strands.

1.4 The Significance of 'Rationality' Claim in African Philosophy

Since the mid 20thC at least the issue of rationality has been the central topic of African philosophy. The reason for this, however, can only be understood when and if we may be clear over the meaning of reason/rationality. Accordingly, rationality on the one hand, has been used as a defining characteristic of humanity since the antiquity. Accordingly, being rational is being human and vice versa. In such conception, rationality can be understood as the attribute ascribed to the humanity in general regardless of racial, geographical or sexual difference. Thus, one individual being born human logically means that he/she become rational. On the other hand, rationality is understood as essential element of philosophic inquiry. In case, being rational is associated with the qualities of being logical, reasonable, and justifiable. This conception of rationality, however, is distinct from the previous conception, in the sense that, the former is ontological (the existential question), is about being human or not. But, the second one is technical; it is the qualities of being coherent or consistent for one's own action, judgment, points of view, goals and others. In other words, a given action or judgment may be rational from various points of view and towards many different ultimate ends. The reason for which

rationality is central to philosophy is, therefore, for it is a defining characteristic of both humanity and philosophic inquiry.

For showing this dual purpose of reason, however, let me briefly discuss the historicity of both philosophy and reason which by extension shows us what rationality claim amounts to Africa. To begin with the ancient Greek, for instance, we can find both ways of conceiving rationality. For example, it is Aristotle who for the first time defined humanity as a rational animal. It is this definition which has hitherto been used to define human nature. Furthermore, for Plato reason is an eternal truth, immovable and without change. This Platonic faith on the authority of reason is believed to be continued; therefore, medieval religious philosophers such as Saint Augustine, Saint Thomas Aquinas, and Saint Anselm used reason to justify the existence of God in general and having faith on Christ on the other. As Yovel puts “The philosophers of the Age of Reason, starting with Descartes and following Plato, saw reason as eternal, non-temporal, and not bound by cultural and sociological factors” (Yovel 1980, p. 3). This implies that, rationality is independent of man’s actual thinking and practical attitudes. As we will see in the third chapter, this conception of rationality has been rejected and systematically presented by the thinkers of European modernity. For Hegel, for instance “reason is a necessary moment of its ascent to the status of eternal truth” (Ibid P. 4). According to him, absolute knowledge is possible through the dialectical manifestation of absolute reason (spirit). Consequently, enlightenment thinkers before Kant did not question the authority of reason; they rather bestowed substantial authority upon it.

Despite this, it is said to be Emmanuel Kant who challenged the “Platonic model of rationality” by introducing what is usually called “Copernican revolution of rationality”. Kant’s philosophy did two things at the same time; on one hand, he challenged the power of absolute reason, on the other hand, he further elucidated the power of reason. Here, I will concentrate only on how he criticized the power of Absolute reason. Above all, Kant challenged ‘dogmatic assumption of rationality’ which rests on “the painful observation that human reason has failed every time it has sought to grapple with transcendental problems” (Hountondji 1983, p. 84). For Kant, therefore, the history of western philosophy is nothing more than the story of reason’s failure to provide a single universally recognizable truth. Accordingly, the condition of human knowledge is limited to the world of experience (phenomena); whereas human mind’s attempt to know about

transcendental ideas (nuomena) is futile. Consequently, it is said to be Kant who restricted the scope of “eternal rationality”.

The question then, what it means for Africa to reclaim for reason (rationality)? In my opinion, rationality claim has special value for African philosophy. Thus, the main reason why rationality claim is believed to have a special connection with African philosophy is for it has been denied to Africa and Africans. As we have seen in previous section, Europeans exclusively self-appointed over the meaning of rationality by defining other non-European people in general and African people in particular as negative others of reason. In case, it is logical and legitimate for Africa and Africans to reclaim for reason. And then, how and in what way can Africa reclaim for reason? In fact, the basic aim of all works in African philosophy is presupposed by this reclaiming task. Despite some of them, however, most of those attempts have what Tsenay calls “equivocal orientations” from which I coined my own expression “the Politics of philosophy”¹. Not only Tsenay, scholars such as Mudimbe, Wiredu and Amato also uncover this equivocation. For example, Peter Amato states that African scholars are determined to use central methodological tenets of Western philosophy to be deemed legitimately philosophical (Amato, 1997: 73). Furthermore, according to Tsenay, it is in the guise of disinterested, universalistic, transcendental, and speculative discourse through which the Occident humanity and rationality standardized for the remaining others (1991: 4).

Consequently, African scholar’s strict compliance with epistemological and methodological standards of the Occident tradition will lead us to question the authenticity of their works. In other expression, to rely on Europeans exclusive rationality on the one hand, and to claim for rationality on the other is indeed paradoxical. Moreover, Siegel when dealing with the question concerning the rationality of science argued that, “contemporary philosophical discussion regarding the rationality of science is plagued by a failure to distinguish between different questions one might ask about science's rationality” (Siegel, 1985, 518). However, unlike Siegel’s argument, Africa’s philosophical quest for rationality does not rest on the confusion about the question, but it is a claim for what is fundamentally philosophical, the one that lies at

¹ I call it the “politics of philosophy”, because, much of philosophical orientation in Africa rests on the hegemonic implication of the West and African intellectuals are also engaged in the task that is born as a result. Before any undertaking of philosophical inquiry, the very meaning of philosophy should be understood first.

the heart of philosophical inquiry. Despite this, Siegel's argument can inform us three important points: First, the need to clarify the question of rationality that might be dogged for, second, the view that rationality in science and in other inquiries cannot be conceived synonymously, and finally, the issue that the meaning of rationality is contextual and shifts with the passages of time. It seems then that, what is needed in African philosophy is to be clear with the very meaning of rationality.

Generally, I believe that the essential task of African philosophy in general and rationality claim in particular is the search for truth based on what Mudimbe called "the right to truth". It is all about systematic search for African form of rationality. Accordingly, though the conception of 'rationality' used thus far indicates European profound disregard for African philosophy and African humanity, then rationality that should be utilized in African philosophy is the one which will enable us revaluating African humanity. It is nothing more than "goal oriented rationality", whereby the goal of African philosophy is not less than the rehabilitation of African humanity. As far as my understanding is concerned, reason (rationality) neither prescribes to particular philosophic tradition nor the attribute of particular segment of humanity. But, it is inherent to all segment of human being regardless of sexual, racial and geographical difference. Furthermore, Insofar as philosophy is concerned, rationality is said to be the seed of philosophic discourse which is inherent in every tradition and emerges from particular experience. Consequently, rationality claim for Africa can be amounted to: reasserting the humanity of Africa on the one hand and reaffirming the culture of black people derogated by European values.

Chapter Two

Historical Backgrounds and African Philosophical Orientations'

In this chapter, I will provide and discuss historico-philosophical backgrounds of Africa thought system, by elucidating the backgrounds of historical pathways to contemporary African Philosophy. Indeed, I will discuss the ideas of Martin Bernal (1987), Cheick Anta Diop (1974), Henry Olela and George James (first published in 1954), those which are tracing the intellectual history of Africa back to antiquity. For the reason that most African philosophers distinguish 'intellectual history of Africa' from 'the history of African academic- philosophy', I will also present and discuss African philosophical orientations separately. Although there is no consensus over the classification of schools of thought, I decided to concentrate on those which are laid the foundational ground of African philosophy debate. Accordingly, I will discuss ethnophilosophy along with their critics, philosophic sagacity, and hermeneutic philosophy schools.

2.1 Historical backgrounds of African Philosophy

The significance of describing, discussing and examining the historical tradition of African Philosophy cannot be doubted. Because, as far as one cannot talk about philosophy outside of its own paths of history or one cannot talk about Western philosophy without its own history, it is impossible to talk about African philosophy either without its own particular historical pathways. Accordingly, the history of African philosophy can possibly viewed as; the description, examination and evaluation of significant sources of philosophical thinking from the African historical context. It is about socio-historical and epistemological examination of African philosophic discourse so as to understand the current situation, as well as to think about the future destiny of the discourse. I have thus preferred to review the history that African philosophy in general and African philosophers in particular come through, that may decide our today's conception of the discourse.

Some African scholars whom I prefer to read (such as, V.Y. Mudimbe (1988), Barry Hallen (2002), Kwasi Wiredu (2004), D.A. Masolo (1994), and others) uncovered the importance of reviewing the historical paths of the contemporary African philosophy. Quoting (Horton, 1976; Hountondji, 1977), Mudimbe argued that "the notion of African philosophy refers to contributions of Africans practicing philosophy within the defined framework of the discipline

and its historical tradition” (1988: ix). It is here, therefore, Mudimbe characterizes African philosophical works up to now as dependent on a Western episteme, thus, not really African thought system as it supposed to be. Wiredu also realizes the importance of seeing today’s African philosophy from historical point of view, by describing “contemporary African philosophy as comparative philosophy” due to African scholars’ belongingness to two cultural traditions, African and the Western (2004: 11). Masolo also revealed the impossibility of detaching contemporary African philosophy from African traditional past.

Herein, therefore, lies the significance of reviewing the historical paths of African philosophy, which will enable us to understand the present one. This however will take us back to the examination of ancient civilization, which can possibly be for granted, and will subsume philosophical thought at a time. Even though it is doubted and questioned, historical texts as well as scriptures declare the history of commercial, religious and cultural exchanges that took place among various civilizations (i.e. ancient Egyptian with others). Nevertheless, western discourses hide this by propounding the idea that the African continent has no history and the view that Africa is not part of world history. It is influenced by such a characterization of Europeans’, therefore; most African scholars admit the rationale of not overlooking and uncovering the intellectual and philosophical history of Africa in general, and ancient Egyptian in particular.

For this reason, tracing the African thought system back to ancient civilization has so many things to do with present day African philosophy. First, it will help us explore those achievements for the purpose of our present need. Second, it can also be used as evidences to discard “European mythologies” propounding non-rationality of African mentality. Furthermore, it can also be used for restructuring African episteme and for rehabilitating historical values so as to reintegrate into the modern. Consequently, uncovering all the importance and values of historical facts, my concern however is not to approve the existence of texts in ancient civilizations which can achieve the above two points, but simply to provide what has been assumed the path ways and the debate over the historicity of the discourse.

For this purpose, I recognize the significance of discussing the works of Martin Bernal, Henry Odele, William James and Cheikh Anta Diop, which I consider texts describing the intellectual

historicity of Africa. For instance, these and other literatures associated with Afrocentrism² argued for the existence of some examples of philosophical texts in the ancient Egypt. Although, the evidence provided as well as constructed arguments for the debate couldn't be reliable, hence, uncertain, it is impossible to discard all of them as oversimplified generalization. The ground where these scholars contend is the fundamental linkage between the civilizations of 'ancient Egypt' and 'ancient Greek', hence, argued for the prevalence of common attributes. Indeed, it is said to be logical to examine those perspective by which they attempted to trace the ground for the historicity of African philosophic thought.

Let me begin my discussion by Martin Bernal. In his famous book entitled *Black Athena: Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (1987), Bernal discussed about the origin of ancient Greek civilization. Hence, he contends that ancient Greece was falsely honored and praised, whereas the supposed Greek civilization was really originated in Ancient Egypt. In order to investigate this, he provided two models, "Ancient" and "Aryan". He described the former one as such:

According to "the Ancient model", Greece had once been inhabited by primitive tribes, Pelasgians and others. Certain regions, notably Boiotia and the Eastern Peloponnese, had then been settled by Egyptians and Phoenicians who had built cities and civilized the natives. The Phoenicians, for instance, had introduced the alphabet, and the Egyptians had taught the Pelasgians such things as irrigation, the names of the gods, and how to worship them. (Bernal, 2001: 4)

Accordingly, based on the "ancient model" he acknowledged that Greece culture and civilization has arisen due to colonization by Egyptians and Phoenicians who had civilized the native inhabitants. This means that, Ancient Greece inhabitants were not the progenitors of that civilization at a time, but foreigners (ancient Egyptian and Phoenicians), it was alien to them.

² I use the concept "Afrocentrism", as a designation for scholars who argued for ancient Egyptian influence on ancient Greek civilization and philosophy. For example, Barry Hallen (200), referring to Ben-Jochannan (1994); Diop (1974); James (1954); Obenga (1995), states that "Afrocentrism is probably best known in Western scholarship for its arguments that both the form and content of ancient Greek (and, hence, eventually European/Western) philosophy and science were derived directly from Egyptian civilization" (Hallen, 2002: 4). However, my appropriation of the concept has positive connotation, in that afrocentrism is simple reference to the scholars arguing for Egyptian cultural, religious and intellectual influence on ancient Greece civilization.

Bernal explained the second model as follows:

The “*Aryan model*”, holds that ancient Greek culture is developed as the result of one or more invasions from the north by Indo-European speakers or “Hellenes.”... This model does not claim that Greek as a language was homogeneous, or that the Greeks were pure “Indo-Europeans” or “Aryans.” Instead, its proponents agree that there was linguistic mixing but insist that both invaders and natives were “Caucasian” or “European.”(My emphasis Bernal, 2001: 2-3)

As it is clearly explained in this quotation, unlike the former, the “Aryan model” holds that, the ancient Greek civilization come neither from Egyptians nor from Phoenician, instead by Indo-Europeans. Both models agreed up on the view that, Greek civilization is construed by foreigners, but the debate is over the real agent, or whether Egyptian and Phoenician or Caucasians were the originators’ of Greek civilization.

According to Bernal’s characterization, the “Aryan model” was lately developed after the ancient model, and it challenged and denied all the truth about the Ancient model. By the same analogy, Bernal’s contention is that the truth about Egyptian and Phoenicians colonization of Greece was denied. This denial, according to him, is late in development and purposive, that is, it is aimed at dislocating Africans and Phoenicians from being the progenitors of ancient Greece civilization, which Westerners see as a cradle of their today’s thought system. For further illustration let us see the following quotation.

This Ancient model was not doubted until the end of the eighteenth century, and it was not seriously challenged until the 1820s. Only then did Northern European scholars begin to deny the ancient colonization’ and play down Egyptian and Phoenician cultural influences on Greece. (Bernal, 2001: 4)

In relation to this, Bernal further elucidated the reason for the overthrow of the ancient model and the moment when the reversal of history has taken place. Of course, the reason according to him “is to be found not in internal developments within the disciplines, but in the intellectual milieu of the time” (Ibid). In the long run, however, the reason is not because of any threat to European values (i.e. Christianization), but “because of the predominance, in the nineteenth century, of the linked concepts of progress, romanticism, and racism” (Ibid). The eighteenth century racism, Bernal argued, did not affect the reputation of Egyptian since they were granted

honorary European status. But, it was “after the 1790s both radicals and romantics began to view Egypt as increasingly African” (Ibid p. 6)

It is said to be in such a way that Bernal described the extent to which the Europeans moved beyond the academic line and intellectual concern so as to inverse the history of ancient Egyptians. As a results of this, non-Europeans (particularly, African people in General and ancient Egyptian in particular) are said to be deprived of their history. Not only history, they were denied of their humanity. Because of this, Western discourses until now describe black people as the negative others of Europe (or white people). It is obvious that, Bernal is not describing the only cases of Egyptian and black people, but he criticized the way European reverse and shift history for their own purpose and against non-Westerners’. Bernal, is challenging European self-image and their instinct that drive them up to the rejection of Phoenicians cultural influence on ancient Greece.

Additionally, it is not only Bernal who has argued for Egyptian cultural and intellectual influence on ancient Greece, but Diop and Olela are also among whose works are significant to the history of African philosophy. Both of them, with some set of controversial arguments, argued for Egypt’s root of ancient Greek civilizations. Regardless of their argument, which sometimes seem weak, sometimes misleading, and on some other grounds logical, contend for cultural and intellectual influence of (African in general and Egyptian in particular) on world civilization. According to these scholars, Africa’s contribution, however, is indirect because today’s civilization of the world, which has been believed originated in Greece, was surely originated in Egypt. Based on some historical evidences and ancient civilization, they attempted to refute and reveal the ground where Western writings were tainted by racial prejudices.

Diop in ‘*The African origin of civilization (1974)*’, for example, argued that many social and cultural practices (which includes; totemism, circumsition, kingship language, cosmology, agriculture, social organization, and matriarchy), in their old and in modern forms, owe their origin to Egypt (see Masolo, 1994: 18). At the outset, Diop clearly pointed out that, his work is essentially presupposed to challenge and criticize Western writings about other cultures and peoples, using some available historical evidences. Accordingly, he contends that, Eurocentric writings (such as; theories of origin, evolution, and human nature) should not anymore be relied

on as part of scientific literature, because they are simply European cultural awareness, which are said to be groundless, hence unreliable. Regardless of being criticized for constructing weak arguments, Diop was challenged, even by African scholars for overgeneralizing the particularity of Egypt for the whole continent. Some scholars (i.e. Masolo, Hountondji) presented as if Diop's objective of dislocating western discourses' failed too, because of the same reason he criticized them. Stated otherwise, although Diop criticized western scholars for viewing African "otherness", he himself does not escape it, because Diop too has invented new Africa wearing the mask of Egyptian. Nevertheless, Masolo appreciates Diop as he has contributed to the major focus of contemporary discourse, that is, "the production of knowledge as a source of power against others" (Masolo, 1994: 19).

Along the same vein, Henry Olela also demonstrates Egyptian contribution to world philosophical thought. He contends that it is the "fact that even the ancient Greeks themselves often credited Africa with being the source of foundations of philosophical knowledge" (quoted in Masolo, 1994: 19). He further tried to demonstrate as if Egypt has been the intellectual center of the world in the fields of Mathematics, Astronomy, natural science and philosophy. He argued that some theories of Ancient Egyptian were appropriated by some scholars of Greece. The following paragraph can explain it very well:

Because of their mathematical knowledge, the ancient Africans of said [*Egyptian*] were able to calculate the height of pyramid as well as the distance of a ship in the ocean from a given point on land. But in the history of philosophy written by Eastern philosophers, these two discoveries have been falsely attributed to Thales. Euclid adopted the ancient African method of determining the distance of a ship at sea (Euclidean Theorem 1.26) (my emphasis quoted in Masolo, 1994: 20)

Moreover, according to Olela, some fundamental realities, which were associated with pre-Socratic Greece thought, are adopted from the ancient Egyptians. Likewise, Plato adopted and developed the immortality of the soul whereas Aristotle Adopted the Egyptian notion of unmoved mover (see Masolo 1994: 20).

In addition to historical works we have seen thus far, the other scholar whom I wish to introduce as Afrocentric scholar is, George G.M. James. In his book, *Stolen Legacy* (first published in 1954), James Argued for Egyptian being the progenitor of Ancient Greece thought system. First of all, James denied the existence of what has been called ancient Greek philosophy for which all

of those ideas were developed out of ancient Egyptian religious system, which is called “Mysteries”³. James described the historical moment when and how the Greeks had access to those system as follows:

After nearly five thousand years of prohibition against the Greeks, they were permitted to enter Egypt for the purpose of their education. First, through the Persian invasion, and secondly through the invasion of Alexander the Great. From the sixth century B.C. therefore to the death of Aristotle (322 B.C.) the Greeks made the best of their chance to learn all they could about Egyptian culture; most students received instructions directly from the Egyptian Priests, but after the invasion by Alexander the Great, the Royal temples and libraries were plundered and pillaged, and Aristotle's school converted the library at Alexandria into a research center. (James, 2001: 8)

Another axiomatic point of departure for James’s venture is Ancient Greece’s attitude towards the supposed ancient Greek philosophy as well as the place and treatments of pre-Socratic philosophers in Greek culture. According to him, the attitude of Athenian government towards philosophy was bad, because it was regarded as foreign in origin and treated accordingly. The other fundamental ground of James’s objection lies in the life of ancient Greek philosophers.

Anaxagoras was imprisoned and exiled; Socrates was executed; Plato was sold into slavery and Aristotle was indicted and exiled; while the earliest of them all, Pythagoras was expelled from Croton in Italy. (James, 2001: 10)

According to James, this and other history of ancient Greek philosophers shows how much they were excluded, therefore, undesirable citizens. Based on this and other historical evidences, James made the conclusion that “Greek philosophers were not the authors of Greek philosophy, but the Egyptian Priests and Hierophants” (Ibid).

The question which I realize legitimate to be raised over here is that: what it counts for contemporary African philosophy and African scholar to reclaim the supposed intellectual territory of ancient Egyptian? Does it worth something for our current aims of rehabilitating and revitalizing the denounced African cultures and values? As I tried to confirm repeatedly, the reclaim of Ancient Egyptian legacy will add some values to the intellectual history of the

³ According to James, it is ancient Egyptian religious system that is also the first system of salvation. It is a system that regards the human body as a prison house of the soul, which could be liberated from its bodily impediments, through the disciplines of the Arts and Sciences, and advanced from the level of a mortal to that of a God. It is the secret order, the greatest good, and the basis of all ethical concepts (see James, 2001)

people, and yet worth something for the historical pathways of our today's African philosophy. I Regardless of this, I strongly argue that the intellectual history of Africa as well as African philosophic discourse must not be restricted and preserved to the intellectual history of ancient Egypt, for the reason that it cannot meaningfully describe the Africa of today. And yet, this way is a unilinear perspective that may exclude other important elements and parts of the continent out of Africa's intellectual domain. Nevertheless, since I am not a historian as well as not interested to describe historical evidence, let me leave this task and the entire venture of proving the whole story revolving around ancient Egypt for a historian. This however does not mean that all the works I have discussed so far are futile, but all of it has to be reexamined and reevaluated in light of its merit for our present needs. My concern is to facilitate easy reading for the interested readers, giving the historical paths that African philosophic discourse comes through by undertaking certain critical and insightful discussions.

For the fact that, there was no moment in the history of the world where civilization and the corresponding thought system is isolated, the argument that African philosophy has to be grounded on African tradition and history is legitimate. In other words, for the reason mentioned earlier, African intellectual history should be bequeathed to African civilizations. By the same hypothesis, the importance of questioning the history of African philosophy is about questioning the history of African civilization. Based on this, it is possible to assert that ancient Egyptian thought system produced a civilization, and since ancient Egyptians were African, then their thought system and corresponding civilization was original to Africa and black people. It follows that, the history of African philosophy must also be understood in line with ancient Egyptian civilization.

Henry Olela says, "Contemporary African philosophy is moribund if it does not take into account the history of African philosophy which takes us back to ancient Africa" (Quoted in Masolo, 1994: 21). This quotation at least may make one thing clear, that is, present day African philosophy cannot be spelled by dumping historico-cultural and socio-political realities of the African past. This however necessitates the reexamination and reviews of African ancient history and civilization. First, based on this logic, it is said to be legitimate for Africa to retrieve intellectual territories of Ancient Egypt, which might have tremendous value for the present day African philosophy. Beyond Hegelian doubt of ancient Egypt being part of Africa, I strongly

believe that Egypt was, and is part and parcel of Africa. For this reason, black people deserve to be praised and honored for that profound and classic civilization. In spite of this, I strongly believe that, not only Egypt's, but also the contribution of classical African scholars must also be emphasized as the elements of historical continuity in Africa's intellectual history. It is only then that, one can certainly speak of historical paths of African philosophy is filled by valuable works. Second, I realize that, in addition to their historical and intellectual merit, texts that have been inherited from ancient Egyptian cultures can be used as evidences for falsifying Western discourses as well as for displacing European from their self-appointed status, as the singular contributors of world history. In addition, those evidences can also be used to repair and reconstruct false stereotyped history of Africa, which was written in wishes of European.

After all, it is also important to consider the fact that, the intent of understanding, thus defining African philosophy from ancient Egyptian intellectual milieu sounds as ideological game. It is true that historical texts until the eighteenth century of Enlightenment of Europe promulgates ancient Egyptian civilization as being a black civilization. On the one hand, European doubt over whether/not it was really African was recent and (as Bernal said), "is because of the linked concepts of progress, romanticism, and racism". Accordingly, this European deliberate rejection of black civilization (which by implication is the denial of blacks' ability of producing it) might invite some Afrocentric scholars to carry out philosophy vis-à-vis ideological game. On the other hand, Afrocentric scholar has been inclined to, what Bernal said, "Shatter the false European cultural pride and arrogance"⁴. Although that is the case, I suggest that African scholars shouldn't repeat the same mistake that European did. They rather pursue the truth, and the pathway to that truth must not be polluted by involving some ideological game. This tendency, however is observed among Afrocentric scholars.

Beyond its historical and epistemological importance, Afrocentrists attempt of viewing African intellectual history from Ancient Egyptian particularity will affect today's African philosophy. Its effect, however, could be recognized from the fact that, there is no homologous philosophy shared by many African cultures. But, Afrocentricist try to perceive the entire parts of Africa in the eyes of ancient Egyptian. Diop for example states that "the whole of Africa shared in Egypt's

⁴ It is one of the objectives that Bernal sets for his project. Accordingly, his work has two distinct purposes: scholarly and political motives. (see also Preface to BAR, 2001)

leadership in cultural genesis” (quoted in Masolo, 1994). Masolo criticized Diop’s overgeneralization and arguments for seeming “a joy dance in the shadow of Egyptian grandiosity” (Ibid, P. 18). Odele also places ancient Egypt at “the intellectual center of the world”. For him, ancient Egypt means Ancient Africa, for which the inhabitants were the descent from different parts of Africa. James even denies the existence of the so called ancient Greek philosophy, by contending that it was ancient Egyptian philosophy claimed as Greek philosophy. Indeed, Beyond Afrocentrists effort of describing traditional African thought, their endeavor also shows how much these scholars are fascinated and pushed by ancient Egyptian history, therefore perceive the totality of African traditional history only through that lens. Nevertheless, I strongly believe that the history of African philosophy cannot be explained from the singularity of ancient Egyptian intellectual history. Egypt is part of Africa and its intellectual history is part of African’s intellectual history. But, the whole history of Africa is not the intellectual history of ancient Egypt. Conclusively, for the fact that there are no homogenous cultural values shared by all parts of Africa, it is unfair to claim to understand, thus present the history of African philosophy as the only history of ancient Egypt.

Consequently, this discussion of historical backgrounds I hope will make the readers understand and justify its proper relation with the topic of this thesis. Moreover, from our discussion thus far, therefore, I come to understand the following limitations. First, because of African scholars’ predisposition of describing the history of African philosophy only through Egyptian particularity, other historical evidences remained unconcerned and unstudied. Second, by being faithful to the standards of European historiography and research program, most African scholars are unconsciously accelerating pernicious agendas of the West on Africa. This, however, can also supplement and advance European presupposition and their understanding of African philosophy through prejudice and based on their own subjective history. Finally, the non-inclusive nature of their research program can also imply as if most African philosophers are unconsciously building African philosophy along the same line of Western discourses.

Despite all this, however, Afrocentrists focus on Egypt and as a result reclaiming its [Egypt’s] intellectual territory was not welcomed without provoking hostilities. They provoke critics from within and from without. As we have seen, scholars from within are not denying its importance for contemporary African philosophy, but they are uncomfortable about the particular emphasis

on Egyptian intellectual territory and blame some exaggerative presentation of ancient Egyptian legacy. The critics from without, however, are totally rejecting and mystifying the historicity of Afrocentric ideas, by taking it as something built for political motive. Mary Lefkowitz, for example, challenged the truth and the credibility of Afrocentric historical claims. She clearly pointed out this in her book, *'Not out of Africa: how Afrocentrism became an excuse to teach myth as history'* (1996). In this book, she explicitly noted the nonexistence of Egypt in the Afrocentric scholars' characterization and presentation. Afrocentric scholars, according to Lefkowitz, are teaching fiction as history, whereas their central claim about ancient history in general and ancient Egypt specifically is pseudo-history (1996: xiv). She mainly accused Afrocentric allegation for lacking substantial evidence.

However, Lefkowitz and other Eurocentric scholars who dismissed Afrocentric allegation are not welcomed by Afrocentric scholars. For example, Molefi Kete Asante, shows his disagreement with Lefkowitz stating:

Lefkowitz and those who share her views are not interested in understanding Afrocentricity. Their intention is fundamentally the same projection of Eurocentric hegemony that we have seen for the past five hundred years. (Quoted in Lefkowitz, 1996: xii)

On my part, however, I am not entirely dismissing Lefkowitz's challenge to Afrocentrists like Asante did. But, I realize the merit of examining Lefkowitz's accusation on the one hand and Afrocentric historical claim on the other. Accordingly, as Lefkowitz said, I also believe that myth should not be thought as history for its negative academic implication. Nevertheless, it is impossible to take all the ideas of Afrocentric scholars as myth. Because, although the ideas of James, Diop and Odele can be taken as unsubstantiated allegation, it is true that Bernal exceptionally provided reliable evidence. For this reason, I think Lefkowitz should also have the reservation for Bernal. Regardless of this, however, insofar as something which is myth has merit to the practice of African philosophy in one way or the other, we can say that Afrocentric myths are used for the good purposes.

2.2 African Academic-based Philosophical Orientations

2.2.1 Ethnophilosophy and the Foundation of African Philosophy Debate

Despite intellectual histories of Africa which we have seen traced back to antiquity, the emergence of African academic-philosophy is relatively recent and young. And yet, its emergence is described differently. According to Mudimbe, for example, the field of African philosophy until 1960s are dominated and oriented by Anthropologists, European missionaries and some African Clergy men (Mudimbe, 1988: 154). It is the works of these groups of scholars, which is usually named as “ethnophilosophy”⁵. Although, scholars use and describe this name differently, most of the time it is used for the work of Tempels and his followers. Additionally, Concepts such as “folk philosophy”, “implicit philosophy”, and “communal philosophy” are also used for denoting the works of these scholars. In most cases, scholars use these names in order to show the radical contrast with the Western philosophy, which is commonly known by its individuality and logic. According to Hountondji (1983), scholars such as; Tempels (1945), Mbiti (1969), Kagame (1956, 1976), Marcel Griaule (1948), Antoine Mabona (1960, 1963, 1964), Francois-Marie Lufuluambo (1962, 1963), Vincent Mulago (1965), Jean-Calvin (1967), are some of the scholars whose name and works are usually associated with ethnophilosophy. Majority of these scholars, according to Hountondji, are church men whose primary intent is evangelization than conducting scholarly works.

Hountondji and his ardent followers use the name “ethnophilosophy” pejoratively for the works conducted by the mentioned scholars, which are highly dependent on the study of traditional cultures, customs, religion, etc. of particular community of Africa. According to them, cultural revivalisms of ethnophilosophy have no merit for present day African philosophy, because it suppresses the urgent demands of scientific and technological advancement. In their view, the present day African philosophers “require a mental orientation commensurate with the problems of the present, not an attempt to resurrect ideas from societies of the distant past” (Ciaffa, 2008:

⁵ The concept of ethnophilosophy is used by their critics pejoratively, whereas sometimes it is used for the fact that, those works are grounded on ethnographic findings. However, Odera Oruka in his book entitled ‘Trends in Contemporary African philosophy’ describes ethnophilosophical approach as a trend which regarded the collective traditional wisdom or the generally held ontological assumptions and worldview of African ethnic groups or tribes as having the status of philosophy. For Messay, “the term ethnophilosophy designates the position of those African scholars who assent, directly or indirectly, to the idea of African otherness” (2004: 3).

122). Nevertheless, they are credited for provoking, hence initiating philosophic discussion and debate in Africa. According to Tsenay:

the present prolonged and ongoing debate in and on the status, nature and indeed the very possibility of African philosophy dates back to the early 1970s, when challenges to the ethnographic and documentary hegemony of Tempels, John Mbiti, and others began to be registered. (1994: 3)

As it is mentioned in this quotation, ethnophilosophical works are grounded by ethnographic data, which are emphasizing on the description and exploration of a ‘world-view’ and ‘thought-system’ of particular community. It is because of this, for which they elicited criticism from various schools of African philosophy and scholars. Even if their critics are from different schools and because of so many reasons, majority of those critics are revolving around “disciplinary-methodological” controversy.

For instance, I decided to present and discuss some of the works of ethnophilosophical schools in relation with their critics, so as to make sense of the 20thC African philosophy debate. Principally, for the reason that the detailed discussion of each work is not achievable, if so boring, I will concentrate and discuss the ideas of Tempels and Mbiti for our present purpose. As it is explained earlier, African philosophic debate has been carried out in between ‘ethnophilosophical’ and ‘professional’ schools for a long period of time. For this reason, I think it is more insightful if these two philosophical trends will be discussed together. In addition, it is also convincing to provide and discuss the arguments from both sides, so as to justify the emergence and legitimacy of other philosophical positions, those attempted to fill the gap in between these philosophical schools.

I have just mentioned when and by whom African academic philosophy was started. To state it repeatedly, the moment or the beginning of African *academic philosophy*⁶ in 20thC is associated with the publication of Father Placide Tempels’s book *La Philosophie Bantu* in 1945. In this book, Tempels presents a philosophy of Bantu community in the Belgian Congo. According to him, Bantu philosophy (ontology) is centered on what he calls “the life force, or the vital force”.

⁶ According to Barry Hallen (2002) description, “African academic philosophy” is a philosophy that is based on academic research or university-based philosophy. Hence, most African intellectuals’ advocated diverse conception of African academic philosophy based their own disciplinary and vocational backgrounds.

And the vital force according to Tempels “symbolizes various forces (or beings) in the Bantu society” (Oruka, 1997: 23). Consequently, for Bantu ontology, all beings of the universe possess their proper vital force based on the hierarchy of forces, which has God at the top, followed by human being, animals, plants and non-living objects. The vitality of each force is understood in accordance with the order, so that God has highest asset or strength. And yet, this strength decreases as it moves down from the highest (God) to the bottom step by step. From this, if one step is moved down from God we will find human beings, which imply that human beings are the second more powerful force than other beings (forces).

Moreover, according to Tempels, the totality of Bantu conception of life is centered on this vital force. “The vital force is the invisible reality of everything that exists, but is supreme in man. And man can reinforce his vital force by means of the force of other beings of creation” (quoted in Masolo, 1995: 48). This implies that, Bantu conceives their life in terms of gaining, loosing or reinforcing this force. More importantly, this vital force is centered on human being, by locating the living human generation at the core of the universe, which also includes the world of the dead. Based on this principal role, According to Tempels, the living can maintain a constant relationship with dead through the mediums. Despite this, when the dead fails to retain contact with the living, it is confirmed the person is completely dead. It is the state of affairs in which the living can no more maintain a relation with their dead ancestors. Masolo summarized the effects of this vital force as follows:

The influence of force on one another is based on three general laws of interaction. First, a person (living or deceased) can directly reinforce or diminish the being of another person. Second, the human vital force can directly influence inferior force-beings (animal, vegetable, or mineral) in their being itself. And third, a rational being can influence another rational being by communicating his force to an inferior force-being. (1995: 47)

As we have just seen, Tempels discovered and presented what he supposes *Bantu ontology*, as a determining criterion of all aspects of Bantu community, namely, Bantu custom, religion and magic. In Tempels’s view, Bantu Ontology represents the totality of Bantu thought system which has currency as imperishable truth, so that it cannot be doubted nor subjected to criticism. Consequently, Tempels believed that, Bantu people have their own philosophy and realized the significance of knowing their ontology for his Christianization mission.

Tempel's book might be valued for awakening African scholars from their sleeping state, more than its significance and proper exploration of African philosophic thought in general and Bantu philosophy in particular. More precisely, when I use Ciaffa's expression, "Tempel's work provided a key stimulus and touchstone for African cultural revivalism" (Ciaffa, 2008: 125). Of course, it is after the publication of this controversial book that most ethnophilosophical works have been carried out. For example, it is after the publication of Tempel's book that Mbiti published his book entitled *African Religions and Philosophy* (1969). Following the legacy of Tempels, Mbiti tried to demonstrate the religiosity of traditional African people. Here, he argued for the existence of traditional African religion long before the conversion to Christianity or Islam.

One main principle underlying Mbiti's conception of African philosophy is what he calls "the African conception of time" (Oruka, 1997: 8). According to him, the western conception of time involves three phases; past, present and future whereas the African conception consists only two of those phases: past and present (*zamani* and *sasa* in Mbiti's own terms). He excludes future from African notion of time, based on the finding of his research conducted on Kenyan communities of Kamba and Kikuyu. In the language of these two communities, according to Mbiti, there is no word for the future which means that they do not conceive the future. More importantly, Mbiti contrasts even the way times move in West and in Africa. Time moves, according to Mbiti, from past to future in the West, while it moves from past to the present in Africa's conception.

In his conclusion (the same way Tempels did), Mbiti realizes and suggests the importance of knowing the underlying principle of traditional African religion (hence, philosophy), for the purposes of successfully accomplishing their evangelization mission. Here, it seems both Tempels and Mbiti are probably right if their one and only one demand is African people change their religion into Christianity. For this, it is possible to examine the logical consequences of their Christianization mission, assuming what Mbiti discovered as the underlying principle of Traditional African religion as true. Indeed, let us say there is no future in African conception of time as Mbiti did. If so, what would be the fate of Tempels's and Mbiti's operation of Christianization (or Christian religion), whose underlying principle is the promises of life after death? No doubt, its success is questionable, and even unachievable. In other words, African

religious activity and belief system which may conceive life as to live here and now would refuse the dualism that Christianity will provide them. The clear implication of this is that, the deeper knowledge of Africa is impossible by ignoring cultural elements of African tradition, such as songs, stories, poems etc. It seems then that, one important contribution which is deciphered and explored by ethnophilosophy is that, cultural elements of African tradition being the foundational grounds of contemporary African philosophy.

As I have mentioned at the beginning of this topic, including Tempels's, those works of ethnophilosophy are accused of compelling philosophy on the model of religion and for predetermination of rooting Christian message. Accordingly, ethnophilosophers are criticized on two main genres: on methodological limits and for bearing western subjects and topics in the most classical tradition of philosophy (Mudimbe, 1988: 154). Much of their severe critic comes from the schools of "professional philosophy"⁷, and most scholars in this school degraded (even denied) those works being an African philosophy. The basic problems for which ethnophilosophy is criticized and objected will considerably be remarked as follows. First, some of the works of ethnophilosophers has been built up essentially for European purpose (typically the works of Christian missionaries and anthropologists), so that they wouldn't be able to provide the reality in Africa. Second, because of the authors' vocational and academic background (or because of authors non-philosophic academic background), their works were reduced to the status of ethnology than philosophy. Thirdly, because of their critics' faithful reliance on methodological standards of Western philosophic tradition, and technical appeal to strict definition of philosophical inquiry, ethnophilosophy failed to qualify as a "philosophy", but a mere description of world-views and thought system of particular groups in Africa. And yet, such understanding and defining African philosophy as collective word view, for "professional school", is to obscure the proper meaning of the term so that, perpetuates a false and ultimately insulting view of African philosophy in particular and African people in general.

As I tried to mention above, the ground from where scholars in professional school criticize ethnophilosophy is surely their reliance on serious and strict definition of "philosophy". And yet, their exposure to Western philosophical tradition makes professional philosophers see everything

⁷ It is the school that involves the works and debates of professionally trained scholars in African philosophy.

through that angle. Indeed, according to Oruka, “*logic and individuality*, which are often associated with European or Greek thought, do readily become obvious standards of rejecting ethnophilosophy” (Oruka, 1997: 14). As a result, ethnophilosophy is understood as if it replaced logic and individuality with emotion and communality. In other words, ethnophilosophy is assumed contrasted Western philosophy, which is commonly associated with reflective, critical and dialogical elements.

In my opinion, the champion and the most popular of the “professional school” is Hountondji, who clearly and explicitly criticized ethnophilosophy. In fact, Bodunrin, Towa, Mudimbe, Oruka, and others are also scholars whose names are associated with this school. At the outset, Hountondji makes clear what he means by “African philosophy”. Accordingly, African philosophy for him is “a set of texts, specifically the set of texts written by Africans and described as philosophical by their authors themselves” (Hountondji, 1983: 33). This definition implies that, Hountondji used two sets of criteria in order for philosophy to be qualified as African or not. These are *literacy* and authors’ *geographical location*. The second criteria somehow seems ambiguous, but it is better understood as whether or not the author is African, or in the other sense, it is whether the author is black or not. The former criterion, according to Hountondji, is valuable in order to “circumscribe this literature, to define its main themes, to show what its problematic has been so far and to call it into question” (ibid). The latter one, “for doggedly defining African philosophic discourse, according to Hountondji, which African scholars must recognize as ideological and which it is now up to Africans to liberate in the most political sense of the word” (ibid).

For the reasons mentioned above and for political and ideological reasons, Hountondji denies and rejects ethnophilosophy being qualified as African philosophy. He contends that, Tempels’s Bantu philosophy and all the works for which it opened the way are nothing but works of ethnology with philosophical pretension (Ibid, p. 34). It indicates that, ethnophilosophy is not philosophy, but an interpretation of various data concerning the cultural life of Africa. Having the idea that, “African philosophy is African philosophical literature”, Hountondji places science and philosophy on the same level. He argued that “artistic literature is distinct from scientific literature, and philosophy on the other hand belongs to scientific literature” (ibid, p. 83). Moreover, philosophy for him is history, not a system. Because, for Hountondji, a conception of

philosophy as “system” is closed, that would make us confine ourselves to some methods and prior knowledge, whereas its conception as “history” would make us understand it as an open process that expresses and transcends in history. According to Hountondji’s supposition, African philosophy can only be assumed and understood along the same way science understood and described. To illustrate, as far as “great philosophical revolutions are always the sequel of great scientific revolutions”, and unless “Africa has philosophical revolutions to produce the history of science; we can’t say that Africa has a philosophy in the strict sense” (ibid, p. 98).

Although, this conception of Hountondji is grounded by the ideas of his mentor Althusser, I think Hountondji is right, even perfect of describing the root of history of science and Western philosophical revolutions. Despite this, the problem might arise when the analogy is brought to African systems of thought in General and African philosophy in particular. In spite of this, he is probably right in describing the future aspiration and inspiration of African philosophic discourse. Because, the ultimate objective of African philosophy in general and African philosophers in particular is to attain the level of Western philosophy is now at, following Africa’s own particular pathways if possible, if not, by domesticating some creative aspects from other philosophic tradition. However, it is quite clear that Hountondji is mistaken when he attempted to set the analogy between two different and distinct philosophical traditions, thus tried to cope up with the less written, articulated and developed African philosophy with the Western one which is usually identified with opposite qualities. Nonetheless, Hountondji is unconcerned about “oral tradition”. But, African oral tradition is “Africa’s unwritten timeless code of behavior and attitudes which have persisted for centuries” (Onyewuenyi 1991: 39). I also believe African oral texts are the peculiar and best ways of accessing the true knowledge of traditional African. Consequently, Hountondji’s here and now approach to African philosophy is nothing more than proving his total rejection and discarding of indigenous African cultures.

Nevertheless, Hountondji that we have seen so far; the one severely critiquing ethnophilosophy, for whom African philosophy must be scientific, written, and by black people only is Hountondji of 1970s and 80s. It is surprising and incidental that his text entitled, *The Struggle For Meaning: Reflection on Philosophy, Culture, and Democracy in Africa* (2002) has presented Hountondji radically changed his position. He has at least neutralized his severe critic of ethnophilosophy although completely changed his attitude towards African traditions in general and oral tradition

in particular. He provided excuse for the earlier works insisting “Among other practices, I spontaneously privileged political practice, more precisely the liberating action (2002: 85). It is clear from this remark that, Hountondji inadvertently failed to recognize the merit of ethnophilosophy, whence understood it only in ideological and political eyes. For the purpose of this section I was interested to emphasize and present his critique of ethnophilosophy comparatively with that of ethnophilosophical texts we have seen. Thus, I wouldn’t discuss other remarks and excuses Hountondji has presented.

For now, let us refocus on our earlier point of discussion and confine to professional school critic of ethnophilosophy. Accordingly, we can say that other scholars of “professional school” also followed Hountondji’s anti-ethnophilosophy campaign. Although it is very difficult to place at the level of Hountondji, scholars such as; Towa, Eboussi-Boulaga and Bodunrin are those who are severely criticizing ethnophilosophy. Despite the difference in their points of view, these scholars are at least identified with professional school by their common intent of kicking ethnophilosophical works into the domain of “non-philosophy”. For example, Towa considers ethnophilosophy as an ideology that should not seriously be understood as a philosophy in the strict sense. He argued that:

What ethnophilosophy praises in the past is not necessarily given by the analysis of the past. Retrojection is the method by which ethnophilosophy alters and disfigures traditional reality by secretly introducing at the descriptive onset present-day values and ideas which can be considered completely alien to Africa, rediscovering them in a militant profession of faith , “authenticated in terms of their so-called Africanity” (Quoted in Mudimbe, 1988: 158)

Being faithful to methodological standards of Western philosophy, they conclusively excluded the works of ethnophilosophers. This, I think, makes scholars of professional school unable to understand the pertinence and usefulness of ethnophilosophy in lieu of their conspicuous criticism.

Moreover, beyond severe critic from professional school, some other scholars realized the significance of ethnophilosophy. Messay for example, praised the ethnophilosophers’ manifestation of African particularity and difference, because it is an approach that relativizes Western methodological and philosophical normativity. He states that “Ethnophilosophy goes against the basic premises of Eurocentrism and denounces the error of acknowledging the West

as a universal model both in philosophy and the definition of the human essence” (2001: 91). Accordingly, ethnophilosophical works according to Messay retrieved traditional culture of Africa so as to harmonize the traditional past with the modern, which by implication avoids mere imitation of Western values and institution. Messay realize that, Hountondji and his followers fail to appreciate ethnophilosophers’ disrespect for the Western canons of philosophy and their subsequent rejection of the exclusion of philosophy from non-Western cultures (ibid, p. 90). It follows that, ethnophilosophy’s exploration of African cultural particularity and difference, according to Messay, can be utilized for denouncing Eurocentrism and to question its being a model of philosophy.

More importantly, Hountodji’s systematic definition of African philosophy (‘a set of texts written by Africans’) makes two points clear. On the one hand, it shows Hountondji’s ideological intention in his conception of philosophy in general and African philosophy in particular. On the other hand, it clearly shows Hountondji’s disregard of Africa’s oral texts, which I think should be concentrated to retrieve the sustained knowledge of African traditional past. If not, what could be the foundational ground of African philosophy? What is the destiny of African traditions? Can’t we utilize oral texts of Africa for reforming and rearticulating African philosophy? These and other questions should have been critically examined, so as to see the fairness of Hountondji’s and his followers’ critic of ethnophilosophy and their definition of African philosophy accordingly. For one thing, if not defending the “uniqueness” and “otherness” of African philosophy, philosophic activity and methodological undertaking should not necessarily be the same for every philosophical tradition. Methodology needs to be used in Europe (whose culture is essentially literate), should not necessarily be used in Africa. For the other, an attempt to understand, define and reform African philosophy without traditional African system of thought and oral traditions, is not less than, what Oruka says “doing African philosophy in the vacuum”. This attempt can also be said, a foundational error which deliberately ignores its past.

From our discussions thus far, we might be able to understand methodological and ideological opposition between ethnophilosophy and their critics. I think, both of these schools are attempting to dislocate African philosophical debate to the opposite side. Indeed, ethnophilosophy’s inclination is to confine African philosophy to collective world view of African communities, whereas professional school intended to negate the foundational grounds

of African philosophy by locating the debate outside of African cultural and historical context preserving to mere ideology and futile talk. Despite this and in light of our earlier analyses, the limitations on both sides may be formulated as follows. At the outset, ethnophilosophy's attempt to equate African philosophy with the world-views of particular community is wrong and exclusive. Stated otherwise, ethnophilosophers' identification of African philosophy with the totality of customs and beliefs of African people is groundless. At worst, the works of some scholars (specifically, missionaries' and anthropologists'), indicate their works preoccupation of evangelization or Christianization than exploring the underlying philosophical realities of Africa. If so, what has been described as Bantu ontology or Mbiti's exclusion of future out of Africa's conception of time can no longer be relied on. Beyond this limitation and the questionability of missionaries' works, I think, ethnophilosophy, by exploring the abandoned cultural values supply the basis of a true African philosophic reflection, since African philosophy cannot be done in the vacuum. Or, in words of Janz "African philosophy is not just cast-off or recycled ideas from the west" (1997: 236), which is the case of professional school. On the other way, their critics' idealized understanding of philosophy shows the extent of their disregard for African traditional values, which are out there waiting for reexamination and reintegration in to contemporary African philosophy debate, or said to be the foundational grounds of Contemporary African philosophic discourse. More than other issues, Professional philosophers' excitement and fascination with Western philosophy, hence reliance on its underlying methodological standards makes them unconcerned for Africa's background trends of "oral tradition", and thus failed to understand some undeniable facts of African tradition.

2.2.2 The Significance of Philosophic Sagacity for African Philosophy

As we have tried to come through in our preceding discussion, African academic philosophy has been prolonged in between ethnophilosophy and "their scientific critics" for a long period of time. It is thereafter that some other scholars worked hard to fill the gap created in between the two schools. One of the earlier attempts is Odera Oruka's introduction of philosophic sagacity. Hountondji, Towa and others criticized ethnophilosophy for the reason we have seen earlier, or to repeat, "for their [ethnophilosophers] idea that African philosophy exists in the form of collective worldview and that the task of contemporary African intellectuals is carefully to document this worldview so that it might be pressed into the service of practical aims" (Ciaffa, 2008: 127). This understanding according to their critics' rests on mistaken assumption about

African peoples. It is also mistaken, because it conflicts with the basic features of Western philosophy, which is commonly known by its individuality and logic. Oruka agreeing with them believe that, ethnophilosophy is unacceptable because “it identifies with the totality of customs and common beliefs of a people,” and therefore “forms a sharp contrast with philosophy developed by reason and logic” (Oruka, 1997: 35). Accordingly, Oruka contends that both ethnophilosophy and professional philosophers have failed to understand African philosophy. The former has failed for the reason we have discussed so far (or describing African philosophy as collective philosophy, hence negate philosophic activity), whereas the latter has failed for the following three reasons Oruka states.

First, it [*professional school*] is primarily a criticism of ethno-philosophy and yet it lacks a dominating subject matter of its own. Second, this philosophy lacks a history, a prolonged period of debates and available literature within which to preserve and expand itself. ... And finally, professional philosophy in Africa needs to enhance its degree of self-criticism; they need to intensify debate among themselves and with other outside themselves. (my emphasis Ibid: 35-36)

At the outset, professional philosophy for Oruka is a “meta-philosophy” so that it is a discussion of whether/not some given thoughts and beliefs are qualified as philosophy. In short, in Oruka’s own words “it is a discussion of mere possibilities of a philosophy, albeit, an African philosophy” (ibid).

According to Oruka, philosophic sagacity fills the gap in between the two trends. It fills the gap of ethnophilosophy in a sense that, unlike ethnophilosophy’s implication “the problem in traditional Africa is not lack of logic, reason or scientific curiosity since we can find many sages there with a system of thought employing a rigorous use of these mental gifts” (ibid: 37). Contrasting assimilationist professional philosophers, philosophic sagacity, for oruka, is the fact that they overlooked despite their pursuit for copying Western philosophy and its methodology for Africa. It can also be clearly indicated in Orka’s distinction of “philosophic sagacity” and “culture philosophy”.

Philosophic sagacity is a reflection of a person who is (1) a sage; and (2) a thinker. As a sage the person is versed in the wisdoms and traditions of his people, whereas being a sage does not necessarily make one a philosophic. Some of the sages are simply moralists and the disciplined die-hard faithfuls to a tradition and experts in (culture philosophy). ... But, some sages go beyond mere

sagacity and attain a philosophic capacity so as to make a critical assessment of their culture and its underlying beliefs (philosophic sagacity). (ibid: 38-40).

Herein, therefore, exists fundamental difference between what he calls “Culture philosophy” and “sage philosophy”. Accordingly, what is missed out in traditional African culture (when compared to the offenders’ [European], whose culture is largely literate), is not Levy-Bruhl’s alleged ‘irrationality’ or primitive mentality’ but only the inclination to put it in written form. Stated otherwise, it is only oralism of traditional African culture, which European racist worked on and glorified in order to justify the otherness and primitivism of African culture by attributing theirs’ with superiority and rationality. Moreover, Oruka’s axiomatic point of departure from professional philosophers can be stated as such: the emphasis on individual thinker places him among professional philosophers, whereas his rejection of scientificity and literacy as a prerequisite of philosophy sets him apart (Messay, 2001: 92).

Oruka’s Philosophic sagacity sometimes elicited critics from within (i.e. Bodunrin, although moderate Messay, and Others), doubting its originality and reliability. Bodunrin’s objection is precipitated by his own understanding of philosophy, that is, his consideration of written texts as a prerequisite of authentic philosophy. Quoting Bodunrin, Messay on the other hand doubted its authenticity, because “the interviews and questionnaires are arranged according to Western concepts and lines of thinking” (ibid: 93). And yet, the results of the interview are subjectively determined by the interviewer so that it is difficult to rely on. He is also critical of Oruka’s isolation of philosophic sages from traditional culture, for the reason that “the supposition of a culture totally alien to critical attitudes completely blocks the very possibility of philosophic sagacity” (ibid: 94). In spite of his objection, Messay didn’t hesitate to state some positive aspects of Oruka’s Philosophic sagacity. Indeed, he finds Oruka’s recommendation of collecting and recording the thoughts of traditional thinker worthwhile “not for repeating the past, but for providing a basis for the emergence of modernity”, for its potentiality of supplying “the necessary materials for the inauguration of a properly African and modern philosophical discourse” (Ibid: 93). Masolo also states that “the traditional discourse which must be retrieved from the sages and sage philosophers must be the runway from which the [African philosophic discourse] ought to take place” (Masolo, 1995: 244).

Most of the time, Oruka's critics are eager and quick to disregard his work, as he simply attempted to fail in the gap of the two grand trends (ethnophilosophy and professional philosophy). However, for our current purpose and for our better understanding of philosophic sagacity, let me quote a question Masolo raised in order to explain the significance of emphasizing on oral tradition of Africa. He states that "How will many African students of philosophy today and tomorrow comment on traditional discourses or return to the traditional epistemological loci if these have been lost in the irretrievable past?" (ibid, p. 243) This may suggest that, description and exploration of one's own tradition presuppose at least the discussion about that tradition. In broader sense, philosophic discussion has to be presupposed by either other philosophic thought or other non-philosophic thought, which can simply be used as sources of discussion, analysis, interpretation and reflection. Accordingly, as Oruka says also "African philosophy cannot be held in the vacuum", therefore it is logical to vindicate the priority of description than setting and debating over the abstract qualifications that professional school emphasized. Most scholars of professional schools (Hountodji in particular) overlooked this important aspect, complying (consciously or unconsciously) with exclusive philosophic standards of Western philosophy. And yet, Hountondji and his ardent followers are ideologically predetermined, in their understanding and definition of philosophy (in general) and African philosophy (in particular). It seems then that, it is wrong to assume that African philosophy can be done (even talked about its very possibility) without reliable findings and outside of its own particularity and historicity. Stated precisely, African philosophy will not be constructed out of nothing more than its own customs.

However, Oruka's sagacity (I think) is one among the other few approaches which have yet been explored in Africa's philosophic debate. Let alone the move for proving the existence of sage philosophers, his projects concern for oral tradition makes it so substantial. Because, oral tradition is one of the important wealth of true knowledge, which I think African philosophy debate should emphasize so as to meaningfully define African philosophic discourse. In spite of this, I think Oruka's "philosophic sagacity" has brought important achievements in African philosophy debate. First, realizing the underlying features of African traditional past (it's oralism), philosophic sagacity comes up with new project in a new direction so as to retrieve traditional thought that will enable us define present date African philosophy meaningfully. To

be fair, what has been commonly identified as pre-Socratic philosophy and taught (in most universities of Africa e.g. ours) is nothing more than collected utterances and proverbs of ancient Greek thinkers. Second, it is said to be one of the important works that clearly explored the ground where African philosophy should takeoff, by refuting the philosophical status denied to Africa. Beyond this, I think that it is the right path that should be followed in order to break the fluidity of oral tradition, in the manner usable for the continuity. More importantly, it is bridge that must be used in order to utilize African traditional past for modern expression, in order to make sense of modernity (in general) and modern African philosophy (in particular).

Oruka's philosophic sagacity has limitations as well. First, in its very foundation, Oruka's approach is not free from replicating Western methodological and epistemological standards. At the outset, the isolation that Oruka has made between 'sage' and 'thinker' shows his faithful reliance on the underlying elements of Western philosophy. Let alone others, his particular emphasis on Socratic Method can be mentioned as example. My observations, however, is grounded in my conviction that, African philosophy must not necessarily be modeled on Western philosophy and copy its methodological standards to be deemed legitimate. Instead, it can only be utilized when necessary. Second, in the same way Socrates is portrayed as exceptional in Greek culture, Oruka did the same job by antagonizing 'Philosophic sage' and culture of the people, which as a result make me suspicious of the very possibility of African philosophy in Oruka's supposition. As you can find quoted in previous paragraphs, this remark is also Mesay's critical observation, which I found worth emphasizing. Of course, it can possibly be clear for most of us if we reconsider historical and ideological reasons for which philosophical status, even "humanity" is denied to Africa. Although this will be discussed in the coming two chapters, for the purpose of this point, it is important to mention the fact that out of concern for their own 'literate culture' and some other attributes associated with written documents, Europeans and some westernized fellow African scholars set literacy as qualification of philosophy, science, and others. Consequently, it is logical to vindicate that traditional African culture judged accordingly, therefore terminated being non-philosophic, non-scientific, or shortly, (as it is usually said) the negative other of Europe. In association with this, I guess that in a situation where most traditional African cultures are still unavailable in the script form (to be used as a sources), the

way Oruka present the so called sages endowed with philosophic mind makes the appearance of philosophic sagacity highly difficult.

2.2.3 Hermeneutical Approaches to African Philosophy

In our discussions thus far, we have tried to see African philosophical orientations carried out by ethnophilosophy, professional school and Oruka's philosophic sagacity. Indeed, when ethnophilosophy appeared as the originators African academic philosophy debate, professional scholars on the other hand are observed judging whether or not the works of ethnophilosophy are qualified of being philosophy. Accordingly, most not all of scholars in the professional school reject the basic assumptions of ethnophilosophy. Oruka's new arsenal of '*Philosophic sagacity*' is introduced as the midst of antagonism between ethnophilosophy (particularisms) and professional school (assimilationist). Likewise, hermeneutical approach is designed to overcome the limitations perceived among professional and ethnophilosophical School. Before directly entering into the detailed discussion of hermeneutical approach to African philosophy, I think it is much better to see its root in its own historical backgrounds.

The hermeneutical approach to philosophy is closely associated with Western philosophical traditions. Of course, its historical beginning has been traced back to theological and legal hermeneutics of European middle age, in which judges and clergy men are concerned with understanding and interpretations of legal documents and the scripture respectively. Here, hermeneutics is concerned as a method of understanding texts subjected to investigation. As a result, hermeneutic philosophy emerged by utilizing some underlying elements of hermeneutic tradition. Indeed, the hermeneutical approach to philosophy in Western philosophical tradition has been closely associated with two important figures: Heidegger and Gadamer. To use Gadamer's own words "The hermeneutic phenomenon is basically not a problem of method at all. Yet it too is concerned with knowledge and truth", in a sense that "in understanding tradition not only are texts understood, but insights are acquired and truths known" (Gadamer, 2004: xx). Accordingly, giving the fact that modern science dominates philosophical elucidation and justification of the concept of truth and the concept of knowledge, Gadamer argued that "the phenomenon of understanding not only pervades all human relation to the world. It also has an independent validity within science, and it resists any attempt to reinterpret it in terms of scientific method" (ibid: xxi). Consequently, hermeneutic philosophy as it is articulated by

Heidegger and further developed by Gadamer is about understanding, explanation and interpretation of human beings existential situation, to wit, the totality of human beings existential situation. Herein, therefore, lies the axiomatic point of departure for some exponents of African scholars, who are interested to and realized the significance of hermeneutic philosophy.

It is said to be the hermeneutists' emphasis on the lived context of human tradition, which is found to be the case within the particular and historical situation of lived experiences of African. Accordingly, African hermeneutic philosophers engaged in African philosophic problem and concern, aimed at pronouncing African philosophy from the lived experience of the people. Among the others, Tsenay Serqueberhan, Theophilus Okere, Okondo Okolo and Bruce Janz are scholars whose names are associated with the hermeneutics of African philosophy. These proponents of hermeneutic philosophy, however, have no common understanding so that they are usually observed promoting different ideas about the hermeneutics of African philosophy. Despite this, majority of them insists that; both ethnophilosophy and professional philosophy schools have failed to understand the real philosophic problem in Africa. Tsenay quoting Towa states that, ethnophilosophers strive to "occlude" and professional philosophy openly "exclude" African philosophy from the domain of philosophy (Serequeberhan, 1994:7). As it is clearly explained in this quotation, for Tsenay (in particular) and hermeneutic position (in general), the foundation of African philosophy should be the post-colonial situation of Africa.

Tsenay's hermeneutic position has its own presuppositions despite some similarities that he shares with other exponents of this trend. Like others, as we will see it later, for Tsenay the foundation of contemporary African philosophy should be postcolonial situation of Africa.

Beyond the sterile disputes between ethnophilosophy and its scientific critics, it is important to note that the concerns of contemporary African philosophy are focused on the possibilities of overcoming the misery and political impotence of our present post-colonial situation. (Tsenay, 1994: 8)

As we can see from this quotation, the foundation of African philosophy for Tsenay and for other followers of hermeneutic trend should be "the political, economic, and cultural-existential survival of the continent" (ibid). Here, the reason why hermeneutic philosophers challenge ethnophilosophy and professional schools lies in the fact that, both schools overlooked the proper

object of philosophic reflection in African philosophy debate. And, this unconcerned object of debate for this trend, must be the ambiguous conception of African “independence”⁸ wherein lies many problems. In their views, the proper task of African philosophy is to explore and decipher ways of overcoming those problems and issues at hand. As a result of the debate in between the two schools, for Tsenay:

Africa has thus far innocently been either ‘prephilosophical’ or ‘nonphilosophical’, so that hermeneutic perspective counters itself both to particularistic antiquarianism of ethnophilosophy and abstract universalism of professional philosophy (ibid, p. 5).

Consequently, unlike these two schools and other attempts before them, the hermeneutic approach to African philosophy is highly concerned about the “politico-existential” crisis of postcolonial African situation.

As it is observed in Tsenay, Okere also believes that African philosophy should be grounded on the postcolonial situation of Africa. Hermeneutic philosophy, according to Okere is both the interpretative tool and the result of mediating and rationalizing the lived experience (Janz, 1997, p. 224). Thus, having the view that “philosophy must spring from and deal with non-philosophy” (ibid), Okere insists that hermeneutic philosophy is a proper method that should be appropriated so as to overcome the postcolonial situation of Africa. This conviction of Okere however implies that, hermeneutic philosophy is a proper method for the purpose of retrieving and reintegrating traditional thought of Africa into the modern one. Including Tsenay and Okere, most proponents of the hermeneutics of African philosophy have a general supposition that the real value of hermeneutic philosophy rests in pushing the issue of self-understanding to a new level. In support of this supposition, Janz states that “the question of African philosophy needs to be re-asked, not from an essentialist but from a phenomenological and hermeneutical point of view” (Janz, 2009: 7). Accordingly, what is needed in Janz’s observation is to reconcile the problem of particularity and universality opting for hermeneutic philosophy that will enable us understand African philosophy dialogically.

⁸ According to Tsenay, the very notion of “independent Africa” of post-colonialism is misunderstood, and because of this misunderstanding that those problems perpetuated by neocolonialism. What is needed, therefore, according to Tsenay is “systematically elaborating a radical hermeneutics of the contemporary African situation” (1994: 16).

Despite their critical understanding of African culture, scholars from hermeneutical approach has some difference among themselves, thereby argued from different philosophical background and in each individual's peculiar perspective designed to achieve some goals. For example, Okere's hermeneutical orientation is said to be philosophic essentialism, for the fact that, the means and the destiny of philosophic inquiry for him is and have to be "non-philosophy". Here, the following quotation would explain it very well.

[W]hether it is a Plato from Greek antiquity, a Hegel from modern philosophy, or a contemporary philosopher like Heidegger himself, the conclusion is the same, namely, that their thought is inscribed and their problematic dictated by the non-philosophy which is their own cultural background, especially their religious beliefs and myths. (Quoted in Tsenay, 1991: 10)

This implies that, philosophic inquiry is exclusively restricted to cultural experiences, which according to Okere's conception is "non-philosophy". Consequently, Okere's restriction of philosophic inquiry to culture can make him being an essentialist, cultural essentialist. Unlike Okere's conception, I strongly argue that the status and nature of philosophy cannot be limited to the tradition for the same reason that non-philosophic cultural stuffs cannot be rejected entirely. Here, the logical argument would seem that; there will be the continuation of philosophic inquiry without being grounded in any particular cultural stuff, as equal as other non-philosophic cultures are the potentialities of critical reflection or philosophic activity. As Okere already states, African customs should be the basis of African philosophy is encouraging, because, as we have already stated, African philosophy will not be constructed out of nothing more than African customs. As we have seen earlier, cultural essentialism is also the principal foundation of ethnophilosophy. If so, what makes Okere's approach different from that of ethnophilosophy? Does the only difference lie in Okere's appeal to the fundamental methodologies and philosophy of hermeneutic? These and other observations should have been critically reconsidered in order to dig out wherein exists the importance of Okere's hermeneutic approach. Despite this, the reason why Okere appeals to hermeneutic philosophy lies in his assumption that "hermeneutic philosophy allows the ontological moment of self-understanding to emerge through repetition for African philosophy" (ibid, p. 225). This supposition, however, doesn't necessarily promise that the underlying philosophy and methodology of hermeneutic is perfect for African philosophy. Its very possibility and applicability rather needs careful and critical reexamination in connection with the lived and felt actuality of Africa. As a result, African philosophy should not be assumed

as if it ends up in African tradition whereas African customs can still be the foundational ground of it.

Based on all the points that have been explained thus far, and yet realizing the underlying principal notion of Western hermeneutic philosophy, some common features of hermeneutic exponents in African philosophy can be explored and put as follows. For one thing, unlike their predecessors' preoccupation with the outdated fashion of Western metaphysical and epistemological lines of thought, majority of African hermeneutic philosophers' tried their best to critically focus on the lived and felt actuality of African situation. For the other, they have at least made a remarkable difference in the history of African philosophy debate (which is mainly described as the either/or of essentialist (ethnophilosophy) and Universalist (professional philosophy)) by shifting the subject of debate to the factual conditions of the people. Regardless of these and other unmentioned significant contributions they emanated in African philosophy debate, hermeneutic approach has some limitations also.

First, the hermeneutic trends' predetermination of grounding African philosophy in postcolonial African's situation can be remarked as a fundamental mistake and foundational error. Indeed, by exclusively rejecting the traditional past of Africa, such a conception restricts and denies the objectivity of African philosophy that doesn't and will not meaningfully define African philosophic discourse. It cannot be denied that, an overwhelming emphasis on the actuality and temporality might lead us to forget and reject the historical roots of today's things, by which sometimes their meanings can be traced back to it and can make sense only in that its own historical foundation. For this reason, the postcolonial situation of Africa cannot be the foundational ground of African philosophic discourse, than being the problematic areas of focus. If the ground of African philosophy is postcolonial situation, then African philosophic debate is limited to a mere reaction and response to European colonialism. But, mere reaction was not the nature of philosophic inquiry, and it couldn't be the feature of African philosophy either. Perhaps, reaction and response to European colonial discourses is one of the tasks of African philosophy. In fact, African philosophy by itself is historically emerged as a response to European discourses about African culture and identity.

Second, Tsenay's in particular and proponents' of hermeneutic philosophy in general criticized their predecessors' points of view for succumbing to "universalism", which I found unconvincing. In Tsenay's own words, "ethno-philosophy and the professional philosophers have both succumbed to universalism which would simply reinforce Africa's position as Europe's other" (Janz, 1997: 226). This critic however fails, because universalism is neither the only problem of ethnophilosophy and nor professional school. It is said to be the basic problem that prevailed since the foundation of African philosophy debate. More than this, universalism is Tsenay's and his collaborator's main problem too that lies at the heart of their philosophical perspective. For example, Ernest Wamba-Dia-Wamba doubts the "authenticity" of hermeneutical positions in African philosophy, because of the same reason Tsenay threatened both ethnophilosophy and professional school. That is, according to Wamba-Dia-Wamba, hermeneutic position in African philosophy "doesn't escape European tutelage in the realm of theory" (quoted in Tsenay 1994: 17). Having recognized this, the other strongest objection to hermeneutic trend questions the very foundation of their approach. Accordingly, in its very foundation, the choice and preference of hermeneutic philosophy over others' by itself is problematic, because it accepts and replicates its own Western foundational presuppositions. It would seem then that, the very objection of universalism is not less than negating the very nature of philosophic activity, which is commonly associated with the qualities of cross-cultural and intercultural conversation. Although this reflection does not provide enough of a critic for which hermeneutic position failed to escape the apparent threat of succumbing to universalism, it can be used as a point of departure for this observation. It seems logical to conclude that, Tsenay's and his followers' or hermeneutic position in general does not escape this constraint either.

My third and final observation, if not limitation at all, is related to Bruce Janz's distinction between "hermeneutic method" and "hermeneutic philosophy". Janz in his article, '*alterity, dialogue and African philosophy*', insisted as if the value of hermeneutic philosophy lies in making African philosophy as dialogical and conversant as possible. In doing so, he also suggests the care that should be taken behind professional scholars' pursuit of universal method. Indeed, he noted that "if the method is Anglo-American analytic philosophy, African philosophy already comes subordinated to it, because it refers to other tradition as its arbiter" (Janz, 1997: 234). He also contended that "I have been at pains to distance hermeneutic philosophy from

hermeneutic method, because that would equally, be subordinationist” (ibid). Does this imply that a true African philosophy is the one that will be able to discover its own unique methodological standards? Of course philosophy should not ultimately rely on some specific or unique method. The difficulties that will occur is that, it is not always possible to detach hermeneutic philosophy from hermeneutic method. Because of the truth that, in one way or the other each philosophic tradition achieves the desired ends, based on its own specific methodological Archie. And yet, some specific method wouldn’t possibly exist outside of that particular tradition, thus confined to its philosophic tradition. Consequently, the interest of entrenching hermeneutic philosophy in African philosophy without its methodological underlying is an absurdity.

Yet, despite the many problems which would possibly be fetched with hermeneutic method, I think it is better if the merit of hermeneutic philosophy could only be seen in the other way round, that is, in its potentiality of exploring unconcerned values of traditional African culture. Africa. According to Okola, the very reason of appeal to hermeneutic method is: “to test the resources but also the limits of our [African] hermeneutic models and practices, by examining the notions of tradition and its destiny” (1991: 202). The rationale of Okola’s supposition is that, the notions of “tradition” and “destiny” simultaneously defines the object, the subject, the horizon and the limits of interpretation (1991: 202). In this regard, for Okola, since interpretation is final decision, and is to close the “subject” and “object” circle, the horizons and the limits of interpretation should be defined by the realities of African traditions and the idealities of Africa’s own destiny (ibid). Based on Okola’s point of view, therefore, what I have said “the potentiality of hermeneutic philosophy” is all about the ability that lies in “*the hermeneutic philosophy*”⁹, in exploring African tradition and using it as the foundational base of contemporary African philosophy. It is my conviction that, the essential ingredient of “the hermeneutic philosophy” in Africa has to be its own oral texts and cultural values through which African philosophy is associated with the realities in Africa.

⁹ According to Okola, the birth of the hermeneutic philosophy in Europe is “linked to the crises in German romanticism and the crisis Europeans confronted with the technicized world and language”. And, in Africa as well, the interest in hermeneutic arises out of a generalized identity crises due to foreign dominating culture and the necessity for self-affirmation in the construction of an authentic culture and tradition. (1991:201)

Chapter Three

Western Discourses on Africa, “Rationality debate”, and the Nature of African Philosophy

We have seen, ‘issues underlying African philosophy’, in the first chapter, and ‘historical backgrounds and basic philosophical orientation’ in chapter two. In this chapter, we are going to discuss those points integrating with the nature and foundation of ‘rationality debate’. Accordingly, I will provide and discuss “Western discourses on Africa” on the one hand and African response to those discourses on the other. In doing so, I will try to see how the African philosophy debate is involved (both negatively and positively) by the claim and counter claim in between African and Western philosophical traditions. Moreover, I will also critically discuss the ‘rationality debate’ focusing on the meaning of reason so as to justify my own understanding that, reason is conceptualized ambiguously and ambivalently. In the final section, I will stakeout some critical positions in African claim for rationality examining some misplaced orientations within African philosophy.

3.1 The Foundation, Validity, and the Nature of Western discourses on Africa

The rationale of providing and discussing what is usually called “Western discourses on Africa”, or “colonial discourses on Africa”, is essentially to justify the central concern of this thesis, and fundamentally, for the fact that, those discourses deny and reject the humanity of Africans in general and black people in particular. And, since the very foundational purpose of African philosophy is to repair the “dehumanized humanity” of Africa and Africans, I think, it is much better to expose the way Europeans fallaciously negate the humanity Africa, specifically so as to provide the clue (for the readers of this thesis) why most scholars and texts in Africa and African philosophy are concerned much and busy of responding to those colonial discourses. I wonder that, someone who is familiar with western philosophy and at the same time strange to African philosophy may doubt, hence unclear about the very nature and fundamental principles of African philosophy. Or, he/she may equivocally understand African philosophy as a mere response and refutation of European colonial discourses. As a result of this, I guess, if the readers of this thesis are provided and become familiar with some racist European scholars on Africa and black humanity, then she/he may justify those response and reflection as one integral task of

African philosophy. Mesay also admitted this fact, which I believe may supply thereof justify the reason why I expose and discuss “European colonial discourses on Africa” over here. He thus writes:

The first condition to understand the problems and contents of African philosophy is to refer to the colonial narrative about Africa, there being no doubt that African philosophical reflections are all attempts to refute the degrading views developed in the West to justify slavery and colonialism.(2001: 1)

As Messay clearly remarked in the above quotation, if one will be exposed and is able to realize the prejudice and biases inherent in European colonial narratives on Africa, hopefully it is not that much difficult for him/her to understand the problems and contents of African philosophy.

Let us look at the foundational grounds and the legitimacy of those narratives which will enable us understand their implication on African philosophy debate. As so many African scholars before me tried to expose, “Western discourses on Africa” are European based views and their generalized view of Africa and black people, which are available in the scholarly literatures of some prominent European scholars. The earlier and the most notorious example who endorses the mental inferiority of African was Hegel. In a series of lectures and book entitled “*World history*”, Hegel explicitly asserted mental inferiority of non-European people in general, and the irrationality of black mentality in particular. In his “philosophy of history”, reason plays a crucial role, so that, for Hegel, “reason is the infinite idea which realizes itself in the chain-link of its finite moments” (Masolo, 1994, p. 4). It is in dialectical process that reason concretizes reality, thereof reason by itself is a reality. Hence, every aspect of life and history such as consciousness, culture, state etc. are a concretization of reason in a dialectical process. In his discussion about “geographical basis of world history”, Hegel stated that “Africa proper is the land of childhood, which lying beyond the day of self-conscious history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night” (Hegel, 2001, p. 109). In Africa, life is not the dialectical manifestation of reason but of “a succession of contingent happenings and surprise” (1995: 5). Africans have no consciousness in Hegel’s real conception of “reason”, but a consciousness that “exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state” (Ibid: 111).

Some texts illuminates that, after Hegel, it is the French anthropologist Lucien Levy-Bruhl who endorses African mental inferiority. In his theory of ‘prelogical’, Levy-Bruhl describes what he

supposes “African thought system”, or African way of thinking by comparing “two systems of inferential practice, Western and non-Western” (1995: 7) or “the mentality of civilized European and primitive non-European” (Ciaffa, 2008: 124). He declared then that, African mode of thought is ‘primitive’, ‘prelogical’, and non-scientific, as opposed to that of Europeans’ which he assumed was ‘civilized’, ‘logical’ and ‘scientific’. It is clear from these remarks that, Levi-Bruhl used “European thought system” as a standard of qualification; thereof any system of thought failed to conform to it is identified with deficient qualities.

The racism expressed in Levy-Bruhl’s and Hegel’s work under the guise of “scientific objectivity” and “universality of reason” respectively, was also echoed and perpetuated in the remarks of other esteemed philosophers of Europe, such as Hume, Kant, and some others. In continuing the legacy of Hegel, Hume and Kant held the view that, Africans in general and black people specifically are precluded from the domain of Reason and civilization. As Hume puts it,

I am apt to suspect the Negroes, and in general all the other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the whites. There never was a civilized nation of any complexion than white. (Quoted in Tsenay, 1991: 5)

As it can clearly be seen from this quotation, civilization that has been achieved by different human species inhabiting different parts of the globe, in Hume’s contention, is the evidence which is more than enough to measure and prove their level of “rationality” and “Humanity”. Based on this standardization, Negroes capability of “rationality” [reason], consequently of being a proper human is doubted by Hume.

Kant, in agreement with Hume and relying on his predecessors scholars’ remark on non-Europeans, believe that the “white race of Europe is the ideal and true humanity, whereas other races are superior or inferior as they approximate Whiteness” (Eze, 1997: 118). Taking the skin color as the evidence of racial class, Kant classified human race into four different groups: namely; white (European), yellow (Asians), black (Africans) and red (American Indians) (ibid, p. 115). Providing this classification, and relying on what he supposed peoples moral conditionality, Kant unequivocally asserted natural talents and capability of each race. Based on the classification above, according to Kant, as it is quoted in Eze:

The race of American cannot be educated. It has no motivating force, for it, lacks effect and passion. They are not in love, thus they are not afraid. They hardly speak, do not caress each other, cares about nothing and are lazy. (1997: 116)

Whereas the race of Black African's:

The race of Negroes, one could say is completely the opposite of the Americans; they are full of effect and passion, very lively, talkative and vain. They can be educated but only as servants (slaves), that is, they allow themselves to be trained. They have many motivating forces, are afraid of blows and do much out of the sense of honor. (ibid)

From the above two quotations, it is clear that Kant was simply externalizing his internal racist spirit than evidentially arguing and defending what he stated otherwise.

Other disappointing idea of Kant lies in what he supposed moral maturity of category of race listed above, which Kant defended in his text entitled, *Anthropology from the pragmatic point of view*. Its thematic idea is that, systematic knowledge of human being can be formulated in two alternative ways. First, in *physiological* point of view, that “concerns the investigation of what nature makes of the human being”, and second, in *pragmatic* point of view, the concerns “the investigation of what he as a free-acting being makes of himself or can and should make of himself” (my emphasis Kant, 2006: 3). Cultural and customary practice of a given race, for Kant, belongs to *physical geography*; while *pragmatic Anthropology* investigates the “reflective”, “conscious” and “rational” development of moral character. After he described difference in customary practices that is perceptible among the races listed before, Kant contended that all races (except the “white *brunette*”) lack ethical principles and therefore not properly human. Whence, all non-white races, for Kant, are devoid of character; “presumably because they lack adequate ‘self-consciousness’ and ‘rational will’, for it is self-reflectivity and rational principled will which makes the upbuilding of moral character possible through education” (1997: 15).

I hope, no further presentation and discussion is necessary, for which those ideas we have seen apt to now clearly tell us unsubstantiated allegation of some racist European scholars. Most importantly, in all European narratives in general and in Kant's phantasm about non-white races in particular, what is more insightful is whether or not sufficient evidence has been provided. Strictly speaking, neither Kant had provided substantial evidence for all the chained arguments he has had on “raciology”, nor any of other scholars has built his argument on substantial

evidence than simply perpetuating each other's biased phantasms and rationalization of their racist tendency. Consequently, Kant's point of view on non-European people, logically reveal the truth that he is negating the humanity of non-white people in general and of black people in particular.

For our purposes here, the detailed discussion of those discourses is not necessary. It is enough for us to know the fact that Western discourses on Africa, following the sustained line of racism, let alone insulting the humanity of non-European people, they even negatively affected the realization of humanity of human being in general. Academically, it may also lead one to question and doubt, thus hate the entire works of those philosophers we have seen rejecting the "humanity" and "rationality" of black people. This, however, may not imply the truth lie-in the thoroughgoing ideas in the history of Western philosophy, perhaps historical moment which was influenced by eighteenth century cultural revival and power consolidation in Europe. What is required of us instead is what Wiredu noted

Indeed an African needs a certain levelheadedness to deal with some of these thinkers at all. Neither Hume, nor Marx, displayed much respect for the black man, so whatever partiality the African philosopher may develop for these thinkers must rest mostly on consideration of their philosophical thought. (Quoted in Tsenay, 1997: 155)

Based on this, what is needed to be done on our part is to give proper consideration for the truth lies in their philosophical ideas.

Apart from those unsubstantiated ideas about black people, they deserve appreciation for their valuable philosophical thought. But, it is also true that all colonial narratives have no evidential and logical base. For this, what is significant for us is to realize the fact that, all of them are founded on nothing more than "racism", bias, prejudices, which was said to be the mark of eighteenth century Europe. Indeed, some of our scholars also recognized groundless European exclusive claim to reason. For Masolo, all of those discourse on Africa "depended on the outdated historical and missionary literatures of Herodotus and mission reporters" (Masolo 1994: 4). For Eze also, Kant's and some other scholars' discourses on Africa was, "simply a provincialist's recycling of ethnic stereotypes and prejudices, fueled by the narratives of eighteenth-century Europeans who had economic imperial political and cultural ambition in other lands" (1997: 129).

Of course, so many African scholars before me have reflected up on those European discourses on Africa, and exactly pointed out historical and metaphysical lies, biases, prejudices implicitly endorsed in Western philosophy. As you can see, most of the quotes I used are taken from other texts regardless of some others. This may imply that, it has been said too much, and it is not expected of me to investigate in new angle. Hopefully, if one may read those discourses once, one can easily understand the fallacious reasoning and biased attitude of Europeans enclosed in those discourses. They unequivocally and explicitly declare the claim that, reason is essentially Europeans and others are naturally devoid of it, which I think shows racist attitude of European and the arrogance of the “white man”. Nonetheless, as I said previously it is important to realize the conventionality of those narratives, in a sense that most of them according to Bernal are ideas of the eighteenth century which was a period of great cultural revival and power consolidation in Europe. Nonetheless, for me our emphasis and concern for European discourses should only be purposeful, just for rebuilding meaningful African philosophy. In fact, these discourses have achieved, are still achieving several functions in the European contexts. No matter how differently viewed, all “Western discourse on Africa”, accepting the fundamental difference between European and African, conclusively reinforced the idea of European superiority. It seems then that, it is apt to us to tackle the persistence of European cultural normativity, as well as lies recycled in the guise of general philosophy.

Generally, I would like to put the following remarks concerning European discourses on Africa. First, it is an undeniable fact that those historically biased ideas have been endorsed without any viable evidence and without any philosophical foundation. Second, those discourses have been endorsed not for pure-academic purposes, but they were inextricably interconnected with the political and economic ideologies of the occasion. Third, it must also be realized that, those injurious legacies have been endorsed not by all European thinkers, but by few of them who are fascinated and astonished by the success of European civilization. Finally, I think European cultural biases and arrogance must not be understood as if restricted to some historical moments. But, as they still be endorsed in a new way, under the guise of universality of science, religion, knowledge or any others. Out of this, it is required of African scholars to critically engage, not the outdated colonial discourses, but of today’s philosophical, political and economic ideologies

so as to end the continuity of those injurious legacy. Even, every philosophical idea from other tradition should be filtered, for checking the validity and applicability in the African context.

3.2 African Responses’, and its Philosophical Implication

Thus far, we have been discussing European colonial discourses on Africa, and how those ideas are metaphysically founded and Whether or not they really represent the reality in Africa. Out of this, it is also fundamental for our venture to examine African response on the other. Whence, the African philosophy response is said to be the logical consequence of European narratives on Africa. It is clear that those discourses are denying and rejecting the “rationality” and “humanity” of Africans. This dehumanizing act however is achieved by rationalizing and justifying “the idea that colonialism was a fundamentally benevolent enterprise, that is, an enterprise in which Europeans were attempting to bring civilization to the ‘dark continent’” (Ciaffa, 2008: 124). Indeed, our scholars’ reaction and response to European colonial discourses are all the attempts of rejecting and negating the prejudices insisted within those discourses. As a result, African philosophy’s responses are questioning and challenging the central ideas of colonial and postcolonial European narratives on Africa. For our purpose, what should be taken into account is its merit for the practice of contemporary African philosophy.

Consequently, it is important to ask the question: “what is the critique of “Eurocentrism”¹⁰ and how does it relate to the practice of contemporary African philosophy?” (1997: 141) No doubt, critiquing Eurocentric ideas and remarks has something to do with the practice of today’s African philosophy. Because, Eurocentrism as Masolo noted is “ideological attitude that intended to annihilate black culture and civilization” (1995: 3). Consequently, the philosophical merit of African response lies in showing the falsity of Western ideology on the one hand, and reaffirming African culture and reclaiming humanity of Africa on the other. The African response, however, is not the only thing inculcated by contemporary African scholars; it rather is presupposed by and founded on some historical literary movements (i.e. Negritude and Harlem renaissance) of black people from within and in the diaspora. Masolo acknowledged the long standing African resistance to Eurocentric ideologies. He puts “The African reaction to Europe

¹⁰ I used “Eurocentrism” the same way it is conceived in Tsenay (1997). Accordingly, it is pervasive bias grounded at its core in the idea (metaphysical) that, European existence is qualitatively superior to other forms of human life. The critique of Eurocentrism is, to mean, those ideas which are exposing, refuting and destructuring of its basic assumption, or, antitheses of Eurocentrism.

dates as far back as the time of slavery in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and realized itself in the defense of African humanity (at times) in a type of apology for Africa” (1995: 11). Accordingly, in being anti-Western ideological movement, those literatures, most importantly, are trying to rehabilitate the image of the black people in particular and defending African humanity in general.

In fact, it is in such a reaction and critique of Eurocentrism through which African scholars are trying to constitute African philosophy. According to Masolo for example, Western ideological attitude started as a mere cultural bias, but it “gradually grew into a formidable two-pronged reality: slavery and slave trade on the one hand and, and academic expression on the other” (1995: 3). In this regard, slavery and colonialism are historical realities which are simply described as historical happenings, whereas those discourses are mere abstraction and rationalization of those events therefore subjected to philosophic reflection. For Tsenay as well, colonial discourses don’t only describe historical happenings of colonial period, but also “represents the enduring conceptions and speculations of modern European thought” (1991: 4). For him, colonial rationalization and mere abstractions of European should have been engaged critically so as to end the continuity of its negative implication. It is, therefore, in recognition of those discourses with philosophic implication [negative], and implicit neocolonial European campaign that African philosophy debate is focused on reflection and response to those colonial narratives, and began to challenge modern European thought. As a result, what is at stake in today’s African philosophy debate is: “systematic critique of Eurocentrism that endorses the singular particularity of Europe” (1991: 5) on the one hand, and grounding African philosophy on its own cultural and historical tradition on the other.

It is obvious that, the whole ideas of African scholars’ response almost amount to the common view that, European colonial narratives are an invention and the rationalization of colonialism; therefore, it has nothing to do with Africa. But, the theoretical ground of their response differs from one scholar to the other, and even varies from one school of thought to the other. What is important for our purpose, therefore, is critical examination of those responses on the one hand, and whether or not their theoretical foundations are worth something to the practice of contemporary African philosophy on the other. As Mudimbe noted for example, “colonial discourses on African speak about neither Africa nor Africans, but rather justify the process of

inventing and conquering a continent” (1988: 20). In this regard, it is clear that those narratives are an invention. For Mudimbe, therefore, European academic discourses are purposefully tainted to endorse illusionary ideas about Africa and Africans, in order to meet and serve European wider purpose of exploitation. As a result, it is necessarily essential to deconstruct conceptual and epistemological categories of the West. For Messay too, “the notion of primitive Africa is a construct of Eurocentric concepts and the logical precedence of the invention of the ‘white man’” (2004: 1), so that they have nothing to do with the realities in Africa. On his way, Messay looks for a philosophy of decolonization.

Moreover, some responses are reflecting the continuing dilemma in contemporary African philosophy and recommend the need to differentiate Western philosophical ideas from their deeds. This for instance is suggested by Abiola Irele

Africans have suffered from the derogatory insults of the Enlightenment. I believe we must separate the ideals of universal reason and equality from their historical implementation. We must, as it were, trust the tale and not the teller for though the messenger be tainted, the message need not be. (Quoted in Eze, 1997: 12)

From this remark, it makes sense that African philosophy should emphasize on European philosophic ideas, since we have said that rather than historical happenings, ideas must be the focus of philosophic debate. But, historically we have seen that both ideas and deeds of Europe reinforce one another in imposing their values as well as in exploiting the resources of non-European people in general and Africa in particular. It seems then that, it is not always easy for us to differentiate “ideals” from the “real”. And yet, the very difficult task in African philosophy still is to differentiate systematic imposition of Western-type philosophy. But, this is not to deny the fact that we have to uncover the need to give proper consideration and appreciation for the philosophical ideas of Western philosophy and their prominent thinkers. Nonetheless, it is to be wise to recognize the fact that, historically as well as in our today’s situation Eurocentric ideas are affecting Africa and Africans.

For this reason, the primary aim of African response is to oppose and reject Eurocentric central ideas. But, their theoretical perspective can be viewed in different contexts, and their reasonable implication can also be conceived from various instances. For example, it is obvious that most African scholars are responding to and criticizing European discourses from pure-academic

points of view by showing logical inconsistencies and fallacious reasoning in those discourses. But, response in such a way (as clearly noted by Mudimbe) reverts to methodological and epistemological standards of western philosophy. In this regard, I think it is paradoxical to suppose and understand African response as anti-thesis to Eurocentrism, for at least those responses are founded on the theoretical ground of Western philosophy. And yet, it is said to be from this ground that African rationality and humanity has been historically rejected. Consequently, to suppose African response as being anti-thesis of Eurocentrism on the one hand, and to ground them on the epistemological categories of western philosophy on the other, is somehow equivocal

Regardless of this, its philosophical implication could be noted in the following ways. On the one hand, since those narratives are promulgating mere ideologies of the occasion, or not philosophy at all, it is reasonable to suggest that our scholars must not analyze them logically and philosophically. Or, more precisely, it seems worth nothing for Africa to respond to non-philosophy using philosophical principles. On the other hand, it seems Africa needs to do so, because those narratives are written and produced by the same mind. It is Kant of '*the Critique of Pure Reason*' who portrayed Africans as an inferior race, and Hegel of the *philosophic dialectics*, who denied rationality and history to Africa and Africans. Not only this, it is the influence of those racist discourses and European biased gauge of reason; by which black people (working and living in Europe and USA) are currently the victims of racism and philosophy is denied to Africa respectively. Based on this remark, it is necessary and legitimate for African scholars to respond philosophically.

Most importantly, I think the merit of these responses can also be perceived in the angle of making African students understand philosophical bias that lies in European philosophy. Insofar as we are doing African philosophy, and since most students of philosophy in African universities have grown up being taught profound ideas of western philosophy, it is also logical, even necessary to show them the injustices, biases, and prejudices that lie behind those philosophies so as to make them understand, appreciate and critically evaluate it. It is only then that, African students will be able to judge the partiality of Western values, and gradually avoid inferiority complex perceived in black people and perpetually decolonize African mind. Consequently, it is logical that philosophically balanced reflection on and response to those

injurious legacies would be one of the best methods of making people conscious of those biases. Most importantly, it can also be taken as the best way of stopping the continuity and persistence of those injurious legacies.

Despite this, however, I realize that African philosophy should be able to castoff at least the central ideas of Eurocentrism, which reject African 'humanity' and 'rationality'. For this, African response should deny and reject European-type definition and conception of humanity for empowering its own conception of humanity. In fact, as I tried to mention, some critics amounted to mere critic and reaction, whereas most of them have contributed none or little in repairing the humanity of Africa. Above all, I think the significance of criticizing Eurocentric ideas lies in the way its implication is described hence remedied. Most importantly, the very purposes of critiquing thematic ideas of Eurocentrism or arguing for the philosophy of decolonization is because, those conceptual and epistemological categories completely annihilate the development of indigenous philosophical thoughts. Because of this, it is necessary to define the grounds and the nature of this critique in line with issues of debate in African philosophy. In my understanding, the significance of critiquing Eurocentric ideas lies, not in the very attempt, but in the merit it may bring to us for tackling the recycled philosophical and sociohistorical prejudices against Africa. This would possibly be achieved by emphasizing on African difference, hence celebrating and working on this difference, which as a result may abolish superior/inferior antagonistic understanding of Western and African values respectively.

Generally, based on those critical positions I tried to expose in this section, the following points can be taken as limitations on behalf of African responses. First, it is evident that some African responses are built for ideological self-defense than for basic philosophical tasks. I think this predilection may negate the foundation of African philosophy, since it is said to be a response to a falsity using other false reasons. What I realized to be done on behalf of Africa is, being able to respond out of and for good reasons. Second, some of those responses are uncritical and have biased attitude towards African traditions, because, it is not common to see them let African cultures be the ground of African philosophy. In fact, it is difficult to say they are biased, for every black people want to see its culture developed. But, it is what I take is the problem when I read some Eurocentric minded African scholars. Finally, most African scholars are said to be

unconcerned about African internal problems, although seen eagerly responding to European discourses.

3.3 “Rationality debate”¹¹ and the Ambiguity of “Reason”

For the very purpose of this thesis is to reveal the ground from which reclaiming rationality for Africa is possible, it is fundamental by now to reexamine the nature of the ongoing “rationality debate” and how reason is conceived hence utilized. This task however is not difficult for us since we have already built some foundational groundwork in our previous discussions. Nonetheless, the expression “rationality debate” is not as easily explained and conceived as any other concepts of philosophy. Because, the concept of “rationality” in most case is defined contextually, so that it is difficult to provide its precise explanation. For the same reason, the meaning of ‘rationality debate’ is distinctively conceptualized from one particular area of inquiry to the other. However, it is a common view for most of us that the rationality debate in philosophic inquiry is centered on the concept of “reason”. As Masolo clearly puts it, the rationality debate in African philosophy has reason at its center, which has a crucial role in shaping and controlling the identity and destiny of African philosophy (1995: 1). In this regard, our emphasis and expression of rationality debate specifically is confined to the way “reason” is defined and used in philosophic discourse in general and African philosophy debate in particular.

Let alone for others who are unacquainted with philosophic abstraction, the significance of focusing on reason may not be clear for most of us. Especially, the reason why African philosophy debate is constituted around the concept of reason would not be clear. If so, it is necessary for us to reexamine the historicity of reason in such a way that, what role it played for Africa and how it is used against Africa. This also is not a challenging task for us since we have seen its philosophic implication starting from the first chapter. But, over here, our concentration on reason is fundamentally purposeful. And for this, it is necessary to uncover all the value attached to human reason; what is reason for humanity and what has been done to humanity with the name of reason’. This is because, it is only then that we will be able to point out wherein founds the ambiguity and ambivalence of reason.

¹¹ I conceptualize “rationality debate” as it is conceived in Masolo with my little modification. He defines rationality debate as claims and counterclaims, justifications and alienations passed between western and non-Western philosophic tradition over a significant contribution to a discussion and definition of reason (1995: 1)

As we have seen, reason has played a significant role in the history of European modernity. Let me quote Nozick for starting the discussion over the meaning of reason/rationality.

Rationality . . . is a crucial component of the self-image of the human species, not simply a tool for gaining knowledge or improving our lives and society. Understanding our rationality brings deeper insight into our nature and into whatever special status we possess. (Quoted in Nickerson, 2008: 1)

As it is clearly stated, rationality/reason has a magnificent role in the history of human beings and philosophic inquiry. In spite of this, its historical usage nowadays provoked critics from different points of view, therefore scholars are deeply demonstrating both its positive and negative implication. The positive implication of reason is not doubted, and also clearly underlined in the historicity of Western philosophy. Nonetheless, what is needed for our purpose is to disclose the negative implication of reason and problematic issues associated with this negativity. In fact, both positive and negative implication of reason is commonly associated with and glorified in the historical track of “European modernity”, most importantly, under the progress of modern science. For this reason, it is very important for our venture to look at the historicity of reason in both European modernity and modern science.

Moreover, the very purpose of analyzing and reexamining historical backgrounds of European modernity is to examine the intellectual and the philosophical production of the time in order to understand how they justify those historical phenomena (1997: 7). Accordingly, we can evidently observe that the history of European modernity is all about European making of Modern world by/through replicating its own singularity all over the world. Tsienay, Eze and Messay whom I prefer to quote here are exactly confirming this. Tsienay for example, clearly and critically displays how “reason” was monopolistically used by European, and other human beings are historically defined as it’s negative ‘others’. He noted that, Europeans globalized themselves, in the guise of “modernity” and celebrated by the ideology of their prominent thinkers such as Hegel, Kant, and Marx. He puts it as follows:

For all three [*Hegel, Kant and Marx*], no matter how differently they view the historical globalization of Europe, what matters is that European modernity is the *real* in contrast to the *unreality* of human existence in the non-European world. (1997: 143)

From this, then, European modernity and respective thinkers invented totally new realities of non-European people using their [European] technical and systematic technique of “destruction-replication”.

It was/is implicit because, Eurocentric postcolonial narratives are mistakenly understood as if they are “rational”, “objective” and “universal”, which are widely shared all over the world. It was/is wearing the masks of “rationality”, of “objectivity”, through which those narratives are implicitly standardizing European singularity and particularity, by destroying the historicity of other non-European people. This point however is stated almost in the same way by Messay as follows

Both the rise of the romantic inspiration and the multiplication of protests suggest that the issue of rationality versus non-rationality is a debate internal to the West itself. The dispute has to do with the place of reason and, by extension, of science in the complex issue of civilization and human fundamental aspirations. The history of the West is the story of irrational beliefs putting on the mask of rationality (2004: 5 &15)

Sharing the central idea of Tsenay and Messay, Eze also illustrated implicit ideas that lie behind European modernity (including the enlightenment) as follows

By dialectically negating Africa, Europe was able to posit and represent itself and its contingent history as the ideal culture, the ideal humanity, and ideal history. While “reason” and “humanity” and “light” remained in Europe, “irrationality” and “savagery” and “darkness” remained to Africa. (1997: 13)

As we can see from the above three quotations, European narratives are positioned on a singular historical track aimed “at universal freedom”, and “the fulfillment of all humanity”, whereas in fact all those narratives are presupposed by singular humanity of Europeans, thereof singularizing human diversity (ibid: 146). By the same hypothesis, for the thinkers’ of modernity, European humanity is a universal humanity, which Europeans have used to frame Africa as being “different”, “subhuman” and “irrational”. Consequently, it is said to be such a formulation of philosophical prejudices and bias against Africa and Africans, that is recycled in modern European philosophy in general and among some racist European thinkers in particular. Specifically, it is within the domain of philosophy, which is usually called rational, impersonal, and critical inquiry that Africans are derogated as subhuman and irrational race.

It is therefore clear that, the concepts of “universality of reason” and “the fulfillment of all humanity” has played a significant role in modernizing European cultural particularity. Based on this, and understanding the significance of reason, I think we are now in a position to explain what the ‘rationality debate’ is all about. “Rationality may be used to convey different ideas by different people and by the same people in different contexts” (Nickerson, 2008: 1). And yet, since it has no explicit definition, anyone who defines rationality straightforwardly would be able to provide us with the vague explanation of its meaning. Admitting all excuses behind the definition of rationality, and yet, presupposed by historical significance of reason which I provided so far, hopefully, I would explain the nature of the debate and its thematic points. The ‘Rationality debate’, indeed, is a reason centered philosophic debate that associates and identified reason with two things: *human nature* and *scientific inquiry*. In the first instances of the debate, reason/rationality is associated with human being in a sense that, reason is an inalienable quality of being human. In other words, being human above all other beings is identified with being rational; therefore reason is the essential quality of humanity. In the second instance, rationality is identified with science in a sense that, among any other areas of inquiry it is only modern European science which is supposedly symbolizes the highest exercise of the faculty of reason. This means that, the highest form of rationality is historically associated with the rise of modern science which is dominated by empirical knowledge. Following its success in solving practical human problems, science emerged as a new independent authority that identifies rationality with itself, and antagonize other inquiries pejoratively calling “irrational”, ‘pseudo-science’, “non-science”.

Out of this, our fundamental and very important question that follows from the above points is that, wherein lies the ambiguity of reason in the ‘rationality debate’? Of course, the meaning of reason is ambiguous in both instances. As we have seen earlier, reason is basically identified as the mark of humanity, in which no other qualification is required to be called rational than being human. But, in the history of European modernity, reason is attributed to some segment of human being, while the rest are identified as its negative others. Reason is therefore conceived ambiguously when it is basically understood as a characteristic feature of humanity on one hand, and enunciated as if it is the attribute of one race (white) only the other. Rationality as it is conceived in empirical science is also ambiguous, in a sense that although all other inquiries are

relatively and contextually using reason in their own peculiar ways, modern science erroneously and exclusively claims reason as its sole attribute and required other enquiries necessarily to follow its methodological principles to be deemed rational. More precisely, modern European science's model of rationality emerged as a yardstick for judging the rationality and scientificity of other inquiries. This, however, implicitly reinforces the first instance in a sense that; modern science arose in European culture, not elsewhere in the world, and by extension as if it justifies only European realized maximum rationality than any other people in the world. In addition, modern science's exclusive claim to rationality, in my understanding, is also the implicit way through which Europeans reject the rationality, hence the significance of non-Western culture and science.

From this, it is logical to assert that the conceptual meaning of reason in the 'rationality debate' in fact is ambiguous. And yet, since reason is ambiguous and ambivalent from its very foundation, it is such ambiguity which entered into African philosophy debate. It is such narrow conception of reason/rationality or "Self-illusion inflating the belief in the exclusive rationality of the white man" (2004: 3) which African philosophy debate constituted. From now then, it is vital to ask the questions that: what is the consequence of this ambiguity and ambivalence of reason? What about its implication on contemporary African philosophy debate? No doubt, the ambiguous conception of reason has negative implication on the nature, development and progress of African philosophy debate. No matter what topic under discussion, most African scholars are not masking the injuries that have been made to humanity in general, African humanity in particular. In fact, African scholars have hitherto been criticizing this conception of 'reason', "a value which is believed to stand as the great divide between the civilized and the uncivilized, the logical and the mystical" (1995: 1). Indeed, African responses emerged as a reaction to such exclusive rationality and to historically dehumanizing acts of the Europeans.

Having understood European exclusive claim to rationality, I think it makes sense to see the nature of the African claim to reason. We have seen that, the universal and progressive history of European "modernity" in the guise of "universality of reason" and "historicity of humanity", using Messay's expression, "is nothing else than the fraudulent manner Europe so constructs its continuity as to assume the exclusive leadership of the historical process" (2004: 19). In other words, it is all about European justification and popularization of its culture, history and science

as ideal and universal for human being. In doing this, Europeans replicated their singularity all over the world hence disparaged the plurality of humanity. Based on this historical fact, it is logical to assume that non-Western philosophies are antithesis to this historical negation of humanity. Indeed, it is from this ground that postmodernism emerges and challenges “Western-type definition of rationality”. Masolo noted that, “the historical merit of the postmodernist critique arises out of its questioning of the validity of taking the Western model of rationality as the yardstick for judging others” (1995: 127).

No doubt, “Western discourses on Africa” as we have seen, are not a coincidence’ whereby their prominent philosophers are seen endorsing European superiority (racial, cultural, mental, historical). It rather is deliberate and intentional rejection of African “humanity” and “rationality”, after all, as Messay said is “the invention of the white man”. It also proves historical interconnection of philosophy with economic and political interests of European at a time. Peter Amato, for example, realized the continuity and persistence of prejudices in the discourse of Western modernity, for which “Western scholars apply economic and political categories as if they had philosophical, anthropological, psychic import”. (1997: 73). If the historicity of European philosophy proves the inextricable relation of philosophy with their politics and economy, then one will be able to arrive at the conclusion that the ambivalent conception of reason is aroused for some ideological reasons than for pure-academic purposes. From this, therefore, can we take those responses of Africa as antithesis to Eurocentric thesis? Perhaps no, and surely not in the strict sense! But, whether or not it is antithesis, I believe the ongoing African philosophy can be done on both senses: in pure-academic response as well as by rejecting central ideas of Eurocentrism.

In spite of pure-academic response, African philosophy must also be considered as antithesis of Eurocentric thesis we have seen so far. In case, it is possible to have important experience from postmodernist critique and critical evaluation of Western modernity. Despite all perceptible weakness and limitations of postmodernism, I believe African philosophy debate at least would have its rejection of “Eurocentric essentialism” as a foundational ground of doing philosophy. Messay, for example appreciates and suggests this stand of postmodernism as a principal task of African philosophy.

No school of thought incarnates better this critical project than postmodernism, given that the most general characterization of postmodernism is that its emphasis is on calling into question the foundational concepts at the heart of Western philosophy. (2004: 15)

If not entirely blocking, Messay is suggesting the need to judge and critically evaluate foundational concepts and ideas of Western philosophy so as to look for alternative ways of defining contemporary African philosophy. It is said to be from the marginalization of African indigenous culture, there emerges justification and domestication of Western values. This willingness as a result makes African cultures unconcerned and wasted as invaluable for nothing. Indeed, western philosophical ideas branded universal and humanistic, and also assumed the highest manifestations of rationality through which other philosophical tradition are systematically forced to follow it. Consequently, what postmodernists nowadays are observed challenging and critiquing is nothing more than European fraudulent essentialism and leadership. And it is for this reason why I believe the idea of postmodernism has to be used and proved worthwhile in defining African philosophy.

Of course, some encouraging tasks have yet been done; at least attempted to view African philosophy distinct and different. Indeed, the works of Robin Horton “*African Traditional Religion and Western Science*” (1967), Peter Winch “*Understanding Primitive Society*” (1964) and Kwasi Wiredu *Philosophy and an African Culture* have a significant contribution. All of them emphasized on the concept of rationality, which is said to held central position in African philosophy debate. If not entirely rejecting Western conception of rationality, they at least confirmed the existence of other form of rationality and argue for the conventionality of reason. For example, contrasting the sustained conception of rationality which is said to be an appendage of modern European science, Peter Winch noted that “the criteria of logic are not a direct gift from God but arise out of and are only intelligible only in the context of ways of living and modes of social life” (Quoted in Masolo,1995: 127). Accordingly, unlike the proponents of Western conception of rationality who rejects the relativism of reason, Winch is insisting at least the conventionality of reason.

Moreover, comparing African traditional religion and Western science, Horton viewed distinctive point of reference in between the two thought systems (spirit for Africa and science for West). For instance, beyond such distinction and the truth of his philosophical ideas, what is

important for African philosophy is the supposed characteristic difference between the two systems of thought, and by extension, of the difference between African and Western philosophy. This difference, I think, will break the hierarchical understanding and avoids superior/inferior dichotomization by relativizing values inherent to each philosophic tradition. Furthermore, Wiredu also argues for the difference, hence incommensurability of traditional and modern thought system, which extensively implicates the difference lying in African and Western philosophy. By relativizing different conceptions of rationality, Wiredu argued that “truth is necessarily joined to points of view, or better, truth is a view from some points; and there are so many truths as there are points of view” (quoted in Masolo 1995: 209). Masolo interpreted Wiredu as if he is analyzing the bases of rationality so that Wiredu’s conception is “systematic rationality”. In this regard, although Wiredu should not be understood and accused of being relativist for he sharply criticize relativism, it is important for our purpose that Wiredu noted the significance of viewing ideas relatively and contextually. It is therefore significant to characterize African rationality relatively for at least empowering the African conception of rationality, and for founding philosophy on this conception.

From this, therefore, though their emphasis on relativity of rationality has a contribution for African philosophy debate, it is also clear that the debate is constantly and continually struggling with European exclusive conception of Reason. In most works, it is clear that European conception of rationality is used as a point of reference so that the debate is continually held to the extent it seems difficult to understand African philosophy without. Messay for instance suggested the need to decolonize Western conceptual and epistemological categories on the one hand, and deciphers the merit implicit in portraying African philosophy different on the other. Especially, he critically identified philosophical advantage behind African difference, and implicit values that lie in ethnophilosophy’s characterization of African difference, which he believed is overlooked by their critics.

Consequently, it is logical to suppose that the practice of philosophy in Africa should at least defy not necessarily philosophical analysis granted from the west, but “the myth of the white man” which is inherent in it. It is from this ground that, I believe is essential for Africa to deconstruct and demystify conceptual categories of Western philosophy. Notably, I found the importance of viewing the difference of Africa more convincing and justifiable; for it may allow

African indigenous thought system arise. In fact, all of those ideas do not view the difference to the extent of initiating a debate from the African conception. Nonetheless, some points of departure will be used as a foundational ground. As a result, African philosophy debate must reject exclusive rationality which has persisted in Western philosophical tradition for; above all, such a conception denigrates the foundation of African philosophy. It seems then that, as far as African philosophy is up to reaffirming the rationality of Africa, and is about repairing the humanity of black people, no matter what might be said of it, the debate could be hold with/without complying with Western conception of rationality, or with/without methodological and epistemological standards of Western philosophy. I think it is sometimes necessary to held African philosophy debate ignoring epistemological and methodological paradigms of Western philosophy.

3.4 Reclaiming Rationality (for Africa), and ‘The politics of philosophy’

It is evident in our previous discussions that prominent European thinkers used to describe Africa and Africans in almost the same expression to the extent it is difficult to identify the foundation of these injustices and biases against humanity overall and African humanity in particular. Likewise, some African scholars almost have showed us the same grace and orientation in response to those narratives. They react to the extent people may understand the wholesale of African philosophy as a mere reaction and responses to those discourses than some sort of critical activity which is based on its peculiar lenses through which it observes humanity overall.

Of course, they are right in uncovering the injustices that Europeans have made to the humanity of Africa with the name of “the universality of reason” or in the guise of “general philosophy”. Moving far beyond this, responses and mere reactions take the central and even highest position in hitherto African philosophy debate. More precisely, reaction and response to colonial narratives has been overemphasized in African philosophy debate at the expense of doing other basic and critical activities. This may logically lead us to question the validity of the undergone philosophical activities in Africa. And yet, it is for this reason that I conceptualized some orientation as ‘politics in philosophy’, which I have tried to explain in the first chapter. It is to imply that, the driving motion behind African philosophy and philosophers so far are politics, which according to my understanding negatively affect the practice of philosophy in Africa.

In fact, it is highly difficult to dissociate philosophy from some sort of political ideologies. For which it is the indication that, “rationality” historically has been denied to Africa neither for explicitly philosophical reasons nor for any rational justifications, but for some implicit ideological reasons. In addition, it is for the reason that Western epistemological standards were/are deliberately used to judge African thought system, in that African mentality as a result is supposed “irrational” and “illogical”, whereas European thought system has hitherto been valued and used in place. Consequently, African philosophy has not yet been meaningfully defined and understood outside of the epistemological categories of Western philosophy. I think, therefore, before polluting African philosophy following ideological lines of some Western scholars, it is fundamental and necessary to define its foundational grounds. In fact, historically what has been done in African rationality claim was a kind of claim and counterclaim with Western philosophy. From this then, it is logical for me to assert that African reclaims for rationality on the one hand, and African philosophy debate on the other, of course has been conducted in the atmosphere of ‘politics in philosophy’. Herein, therefore, lies the reason why I intended to provide my own observation is the ground from where African philosophy misconceived and oriented as a result.

As I have tried to state in the historical backgrounds, some scholars’s orientations sounds as if meant for ideological self-defense than for authentically defining African philosophy. Accordingly, it is true that the works of James, Olela and Diop can be considered as those describing the history of African thought system. Nonetheless, they also affected philosophic foundation for at least following the footsteps of European ideological self-definition and self-presentation. This implies that, they followed European road when they ascribe the paternity of rationality to Africa via Egypt (Messay, 2013: 37). Such ideological self-defense, however, can’t be restricted to some particular works; it rather is said pervade the entire tasks of African philosophy then after. And still, I am not denying the possibility of doing philosophy with, and for achieving some ideologies. Because, since most European philosophical works are done for ideological purposes, it is logical that African philosophy cannot be the only exception. Despite this, as we all know African philosophy because of problems from within and out have not yet been meaningfully grounded. European philosophy, for example, has no problem with this for it is has a good ground and has long experiences when compared to ours. It is for this reason,

therefore, why I am arguing for African philosophy to be founded not meant for ideological ends.

In fact, neither Diop nor any other scholar individually accused of ideologizing African philosophy, for which the primary intent of any scholar is basically to decipher perspectives of doing philosophy in Africa. Once the intent of any given scholar is philosophical task, ideologizing it could be the possibility (whether intentional or not). Most importantly, it is said to be the illusion which has been founded with African philosophy thereby most scholars are oriented paradoxically to the point of missing the very meaning of philosophic inquiry. It is also said to be the experience that they inherited from their encounter with Western philosophy in general and some scholars in particular. In fact, European philosophy might have had a meaningful base of which ancient Greek bequeathed not only to them, to the rest of the world although eighteenth century Europeans (according to Bernal) used to denigrate the humanity of other people. African philosophy on the other hand has not been based on its cultural particularity thereof controversies continued to the present date.

Imbo for example illustrated the mistake for which African philosophy has hitherto failed of exploring and using traditional culture as a base of African philosophy.

Western scholars are unprepared or unable to read the “texts” that may inform them on African religion. In the same way, African Christian apologists like Mbiti look in the wrong place if their aim is to address African culture meaningfully (2004: 367).

Accordingly, it is reasonable to state that it was following qualification standards of Western *episteme* that African scholars have failed at least to document the original thought of traditional African societies. In other words, it is due to their failure to realize the limitation behind their own philosophical orientation, for which African scholars were/are seen presenting Europeans and their traditions as solely responsible for those problems nowadays are inhibiting the progress of African philosophy. But, I think African scholars equally share the responsibility thereof they should be blamed and equally condemned for at least unconcerned of traditional values of Africa as well as for their equivocal understanding of philosophy in general and African philosophy in particular.

Even nowadays, some scholars are arguing for the existence of seventeenth century African philosophy by some particular examples, and presenting them as evidence. Among other Ethiopian sources of literary works, Zar'a ya'aqob's philosophical treatise called *hatata* in geez and translated to English by Claude Sumner (Professor of Philosophy at Addis Ababa University A.A.U) is usually taken as an example. Professor Sumner commonly presented as if many of the ideas in *hatata* are comparable to philosophical ideas of rationalist philosophers of Europe such as Rene Descartes and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Mudimbe, 1988: 202).

In fact, ancient Egyptian and Abyssinians origins of literary sources were/are controversially taken as parts of African philosophy. But, Zar'a Ya'aqob undeniably is widely known as the most important figures of seventeenth century Abyssinian philosopher who critically challenged the teaching of Christianity and fundamentally questioned his faith in God. Barry Hallen (2002), for example, appreciated philosophical observation of Zar'a ya'aqob, and also stated the significance of his philosophy, and even noted the importance it may have in being part of history of African philosophy. He noted that "what is philosophically remarkable about this text [*hatata*] is the prominence, indeed primacy, it assigns to human reason". Agreeing with Hallen, I also believe that such important figures have important contributions so that today's African scholars should emphasize and explore such a kind of philosophical works for the continuity of their thoughts as well as for such source may diversify the history of African philosophy. Mudimbe however questioned the importance that lies in ancient Ethiopian texts, for they witness to regional inspiration, and most importantly, for "all of those texts are somehow 'subject' commenting upon themselves and their restlessness" (1988: 203)

My concern, however, is neither affirming nor denying these texts as part of African philosophy, but to see the implication of appealing; both from particular tradition and from some individual's point of view in line with fundamental realities in Africa. Indeed, I realize that evidential appeal from one particular tradition and from single point of view is the indication of continuing the legacy of ideological self-defense. Particularly, Zar'a Ya'aqob is emphasized above all, for it may easily meet "literacy-philosophy" criterion of Western philosophy. Incontestably, the main reason for which the existence of African philosophy has been doubted in general, and African rationality was rejected in particular, is nothing more than for the absence of written texts describing traditional thought of Africa. Or, for the incommensurability of African and European

cultures when ours are brought to be examined under the qualification standards exclusively established by the Europeans themselves. The question is then: once Zar'a Ya'aqob's philosophy meets exclusive standards of Western Philosophy, could it be taken as the best representative of African philosophy? The answer I think is surely negative, because it may not even be the best representative of Ethiopian philosophy. It surely meets 'literary-philosophy' standards of Western philosophy and some fellow African scholars' confirmation and dependence on this qualification; but, it is highly difficult to even take as the representative of one country.

For this, I thought that unless African scholars will be able to break the continuity of "literary-philosophy" qualification of Western *episteme*, it is impossible to revive the traditional culture so as to use as bases of African philosophy. I think if African oral texts are concerned, it is possible to find so many thinkers and wise individuals holding important philosophical ideas, not only in the whole continent, even in other parts of today's Ethiopia. Undeniably, literacy is said to be the main problem that affects the study in present day Ethiopia for which the southern part of the country has been known for using oral tradition. It is recently that such oral texts are concerned and written therefore some important political, ethical and religious thought of societies in the southern part is being retrieved and widely known today, i.e. Oromo of Ethiopia¹². For example, *Gadaa* political system of Oromo people which is believed to be one of the best political systems in Africa is recently known, once oral tradition of Oromo people is studied. Let us see the following quote, which I thought will help us understand Oromo identity, "one of the most numerous people in Africa" (1996: 5), comparatively with other neighboring societies.

Any identity needs the presence of other comparable identities in order to define itself. Oromo identity has defined itself, has been defined by others, as it is seen to stand in opposition to other comparable national identities, most obviously that of the Amhara but also of the Tigray, Eritreans, and Somalian's (Baxter, Hultin and Triulzi, 1996: 8).

As these scholars tried to indicate, Oromo identity and worldview is comparatively different and distinct from that of societies and peoples mentioned in the above quotation. Oromo worldview as well as thought system fundamentally contrasts that of the Amhara, Tigray, and Eritrians, who collectively call themselves *habesha*. In fact, they have common sociohistorical and religious

¹² According to P.T.W. Baxter, Jan Hultin and Alessandro Triulzi's text, *Being and Becoming Oromo* (1996: 5), Oromo of Ethiopia make up around 40 percent of the total population and contribute 60 percent of the GDP of the current Ethiopia.

backgrounds. Especially, they have commonly identified themselves with Orthodox Christianity and for tracing their ancestor's origin back to queen Sheba and king Solomon of Israel. Oromo people, in different from these people as well as that of Somalian's (religiously Muslims) have its own history, and usually isolated for having its own religion called *Waaqefannaa*, (the name derived from the Oromo supreme God called *Waaqa*) and ethical thought called *Safuu*, and political thought and institution called *Gadaa* system.

Most importantly, one may need the detailed provision of Oromo philosophy with which I am not concerned now, whereas I can only suggest some texts and article. Including the above text which I quoted from, the interested reader may use a text entitled, *African philosophy in Ethiopia* (2013), edited by Bekele Gutema and Charles C. Verharen. In this text, for example, he/she can find articles written on Oromo philosophy, i.e. on *Gadaa* political thought, by Tadesse Lencho, and its moral dimensions by Tenna Dawo, and even other studies on Ethiopian philosophy over all, and Oromo's specifically.

In spite of this, others may also need the reason why I am concerned of presenting the particularity of Oromo people as an example. For this, my honest and rational justification is that, I thought Oromo people could be the best example for my purpose whose philosophy lies in oral tradition, and most importantly, for the fact that Oromo people is one of the homogeneously large people, whose traditional thought is uncontaminated either by the teaching of Christianity, or by Islam. Of course, it is impossible to argue that nowadays Oromo people are religiously *Waaqefata*, politically ruled by *Gadaa* system or other thought system of the people. Despite all historical stereotypes Oromo people have undergone, it is true that most of their traditional thoughts are more or less intact. It is for this reason that I used to model the case of Oromo people for thought system in most traditions in Africa.

My point, after all, is that our scholars' pursuit for one singular tradition, or search for one individual's point of view may negatively affect the very base of African philosophy. As I have pointed out already, Zar'a Ya'aqob's philosophical ideas could not even be the best representative of Ethiopia. Nor does ancient Egyptians' be the representative of today's Africa. It seems me to then that, African scholars' fundamental task is to critically study African traditions,

by overcoming their restrictive predilection to some particular traditions and some individual points of view.

I sometimes wonder that we must not define African philosophy along political, economic and ideological lines by restricting to geographic location. For, in my supposition, African philosophy is only meaningfully understood insofar as it is founded on black humanity. This, however, is not to ignore the fact that countries (regardless of having black or non-black people) in Africa were/are unified for common ideological, political and economic agendas. But, if our criterion is geography, then morality, religion of Arabs (Islam) and that of Semite people (Christianity) is going to be among the founding principles of African philosophy, whereas that of blacks in the diaspora is for others. This, in my understanding is impossible, and also unreal. What is real for most us is that to be African is to be black and being black is also to be African.

From this ground, I want African philosophy to be genuinely African which is founded on black humanity. It must be founded on the morality, religion of black people, so that neither Islam nor Christianity meaningfully describes the foundation of African philosophy. Regardless of this, black and non-black people within in the continent may still have the same philosophical destination insofar as every philosophic tradition in the world has ‘humanity’ as a destination. But, this might not necessarily imply that each specific center must have common foundation towards humanity. Rather, every philosophic tradition has its own unique perspective that has been founded on its own inherent values. For me, therefore, African philosophy is about a search for true black humanity through which we may look at humanity in general. If not, it can only be taken as African version of European or other people’s humanity, not authentically African.

Out of those reasons I have tried to emphasize, I would like to insist that African reclaim for rationality has been paradoxical for minimally unconcerned hence thrashing traditional African cultures. What is principal by now is to be able to learn from the historical relation of Africa and Western philosophy in general, and of conception of rationality in particular. African scholars need to react critically and impartially to historicity of rationality. In spite of this, some African scholars provided the negative aspect of reason. Let us see a quote from Tsenay as an example:

By “reason” Kant means exclusively the instrumental and calculative control (i.e. “rational control”) of the natural environment and of human person as a being of

nature with the possibility for the rational freedom, or the state of humanity beyond the “lawless freedom” of non-European savages (1997: 151)

As we can see, Tsenay is insisting European conception of reason/rationality on the one hand, and deciphering prejudices that lie in it on the other. For instance, it is insignificant for our purpose to isolate and present the negative implication alone insofar as such a conception historically has been produced important achievement for European modernity as well as for enhancing the humanity of human beings. What is needed instead is, to critically examine the way Europeans have benefited from, in line with its negative implication. No further illustration is necessary, for which we all are familiar with what Europeans attained with such a conception. It is with the help of what is supposed “calculative conception of reason” or “rational control” that Europeans have been able to advance human life, cure killing diseases, discover some useful technologies etc. In recognizing this, it is fundamental for Africa to explore its own conception of reason/rationality, for which it is only then that Africa may be able to replace the negative aspect of European conception and incorporate the positive one for its own limitations.

Moreover, what I realize by now that African and Western philosophies claim and counter claim over the meaning of rationality growing high, therefore, African philosophy may be restricted to such either/or. From now, then, it is essential for us to understand African philosophy more than this oppositional attitude. In fact, most of us are provided, hence understood European cultural arrogance and injustice found in their philosophy as a result of our scholars (i.e. Eze, Messay, Ramose, Tsenay and others) critical reaction. Regardless of this, it is also evident that they are endorsing the culpability of their previous oppressor without putting little or no remark about the weakness on behalf of the oppressed (Africa). Indeed, it is paradoxical for me why most of them, who are good enough in analyzing European colonial and neocolonial impact, remain silent about Africa’s internal problems, especially, the reason why they stated little or nothing about colonization within or internal colonization. Despite all the rationale behind, it reminds me at least one thing: our scholars’ ideologizing philosophy as exactly as some European scholars did. Consequently, insofar as Africa’s previous “struggle for reason” has failed for ideological orientation of some European and African scholars, it is necessary for contemporary African scholars to disengage from ideological game. What is principal is by now is retrieving the African way of perceiving humanity and rationality for further development.

Incontestably, reason historically has been monopolistically used by Europeans to the extent of rejecting the humanity of other non-European people, or to the point that other non-white people are defined as its negative 'others'. Europeans still promote the glory of their tradition, for the fact that they meaningfully rooted reason in their own cultural tradition. Unrecognized the priority of doing the same task, African scholars have tended to imitating this form of rationality, through which Europeans imposed their morality, religion, science etc. on us. By critically reviewing the historicity of Western philosophy, Messay (2013), explores the fact that "myth" and "rationality" complement one another, while endorsed as if they contradict each other. It is following the alleged contrast, according to Messay, that African scholars are trying to imitate Western model of rationality by rejecting the totality of African mythology. What has to be done rather for him, "is to reconnect with one's specificity so as to map out a new direction in which a recovered centrality inspires borrowings from and dealings with the West" (2013: 40). This analysis for instance clearly indicates the extent to which internalizing Western representation blocked African initiative. Hopefully, Messay explores the correct pathway to end African philosophical dilemma in general, and the best way for empowering Africa's form of rationality in particular. From this, then, it is fundamentally essential for us to reconnect with traditional myths so as to use those promising values as a center of African philosophical task, of rooting reason in this center.

Generally, I can assert that philosophical problems are now clearer than they have ever been. For this, Africa must be able to learn from its own historical traditions as well as from others. Historical traditions of European philosophy are widely available let alone to learn from their experiences, even to posit our traditional past makes sense of our current life, and even to venture into new form of rationality comparatively with that of Europeans. In case, it is historical mistake for overlooking African traditional values, but we are now in the right time so as to revalue the denigrated humanity. For this, it is necessary that African traditions presented for critical reflection so that it is only then that some problems are avoided and those inspiring values are reconnected to our present need. More precisely, it is only when our previous form of rationality is reemphasized that we will be able to avoid those formidable challenges to our new venture of rationality. This after all is what philosophic task basically is. Philosophy is not an ideology, nor is ideology a philosophy. As far as my understanding is concerned, philosophy is

all about a systematic search for truth. Therefore, African philosophy (as it is everywhere in the world) is all about a continual self-searching activity.

Chapter Four

Possible Ways of Reclaiming Rationality for Africa

As we may understand from the title, this chapter is about indicating possible ways of reclaiming rationality for Africa. It is more or less the conclusion of the thesis. Indeed, I will try to put my concluding remarks of the preceding chapters. Additionally, I will stake out some critical positions in African philosophy debate based on the points that we have seen so far. Finally, I will suggest alternative paths of reclaiming for reasons and conclude.

4.1 Reason and Philosophy

As I have stated in the previous chapter, the meaning of reason/rationality which is the topic of debate in modern philosophy is said to be “Europeans biased gauge” which was lately and purposefully coined. I can now affirm that, it has nothing to do with essential meaning of both rationality and philosophizing. For proving this, therefore, what is important for me is to analyze the historicity of reason in line with that of philosophy. And yet, the historicity of African philosophy along with that of the European, for I am convinced that both camps missed basic meaning of rationality and philosophy. I believe modern European philosophy in general and conception of rationality in particular constitute the biased form of perennial philosophy and rationality. Indeed, it is this understanding of philosophy and rationality that is echoed by most African scholars. What is supposed to be a mistake of modern European philosophy logically implicates the weakness of the African scholars. Consequently, for the detail of the highlighted points as well as to justify the central arguments of this thesis, I will see the meaning of Philosophy and reason as going back to the beginning in the Greek antiquity.

In fact, it is always difficult to give a clear-cut definition of philosophy. If one may attempt to do so, he/she can only provide a vague explanation of what philosophy fundamentally is. For this reason, it is common to see philosophers abstaining from providing the clear-cut definition of philosophy. They rather prefer to define philosophy from various points of view and in different contexts. This is perhaps for the complexity of its nature, for its unconfined boundaries, and for the broadness of issues underlying the task of philosophizing. For example, in order to describe the difficulty behind the definition of philosophy, Karl Jaspers stated that “no formula can exhaust its meaning and none can be exclusive”, but “we can determine the nature of philosophy

only by actually experiencing it” (1954: 7). Regardless of the undetermined nature of its definition, it is true that every epoch in the history of philosophy is analyzable according to the temporality of philosophical thought by which specific idea is related to existential situation of the occasion. Above all, however, what is really important to be known by everyone of us is the inextricability of philosophy and reason/rationality. Indeed, philosophy and rationality are understood as different sides of the same coin. And still, historically as well as in the present day experiences, philosophy is said to be the inquiry where reason is exercised at the maximum level.

Let us consider for a moment the beginning of defining and understanding philosophy from which we may also conceive the meaning of reason thereafter. In doing this, we may also cross-check the definition of African philosophy as well. Because, it seems our scholars’s definition and understanding of philosophy in general and African philosophy in particular stand under either direct or indirect influence of the European philosophical orientation. As one scholar puts it, the task of philosophy since Socrates has been to give reflective account of existence, to clarify and illuminate human life (Grabou, 1971: vi). Philosophy according to this model is assumed as the natural inclination of man—the most usual and the most natural way of questioning about cosmos, of God, of the nature of human being in general. Philosophizing in this context is associated with two main tasks; “a critical inquiry in to many areas of human experience” on the one hand, and “constructing ontological account of reality” on the other (ibid). Consequently, reason/rationality in this context can be understood in two independent but complementary ways, that is, as the essential element of humanity, and as a defining characteristic of philosophic activity.

Regardless of this, however, the meaning of both philosophy and rationality has gradually been altered, and nowadays, both are conceptualized more or less losing their initial meaning and understanding. Both concepts are defined and described as the appendages of modern science. Accordingly, philosophy is characterized as speculative inquiry for the ancient Greeks, however, is judged as futile whereas reason/rationality is understood as a defining feature of modern science. Yovel, for example, stated how and in what way the meaning of reason gradually shifted and philosophy also lose its previous autonomy as follows

The history of reason is in principle finite; it culminates in scientific revolutions, which elevate the various theoretical disciplines to the level of valid science, and thus, in fact, abolish their history and give them a final, immutable form. (1980: 6)

Indeed, the previous autonomy and power of both philosophy and reason is restricted. It is said to be Kant who identified the scope of reason, by identifying of objective-knowledge which is directed to particular things distinguishable from other things (Jaspers, 1955: 55). In other words, self-confidence of philosophy deteriorated, therefore, “at the turn of the century, philosophy was for the part conceived as one science among others” (Grabau, 1971: 4). Thus, the meaning of both rationality and philosophy is altered for some reasons.

Because of this, therefore, we can say that tracing the definition of philosophy and rationality back to the beginning in the Greek antiquity, above all, can help us understand the essential meaning of philosophy. According to Jaspers, for example, basic understanding of philosophy culminates in scientific revolution, and as a result, the task of philosophy is reduced to the status of what he calls “pseudo-scientific philosophizing” (1955: 54). For this reason, it seems to me that such conception has little to do for setting forth authentically African canon of rationality. In my opinion, the ancient Greek experience of philosophy can be the best experience for defining African philosophy in general and for exploring African form of rationality in particular for the following reasons. First, for the ancient Greeks the philosophic problems are present in their mythology from which they explore their thought system in general and form of rationality in particular. For this reason, such experience might pave the way for African mythology to be given due emphasis than being thrown as something insignificant and irrational. Second, it can help us to examine ideological functions of both “modern science” and “general philosophy”. As we have seen in previous sections, the ambivalent and exclusive meaning of rationality and philosophy is the only problem of European modernity. Thus, we can understand that modern European philosophy implicitly promotes their economic, political and scientific interest. Thirdly, it can help us to carry out mental decolonization in a new way by African indigenous form of thinking.

Nevertheless, defining and understanding African philosophy based on the modern conception, however, may achieve our material needs but cannot be used to explore the totality of African thinking. In other words, to attempt to define in such a way is nothing less than preserving

African philosophy to the particularity of rigorous science. Karl Jaspers, however, is referring the irrational bases of rationality and the none existence of one without the other as we can see in this quotation

The rational is not thinkable without its other, the non-rational, and it never appears in reality without it. The only question is, in what form the other appears, how it remains in spite of all, and how it has to be grasped. It is appropriate for philosophizing to strive to absorb the non-rational and counter-rational, to form it through reason, to change it into reason. (Jaspers, 1955: 19)

Here, Jaspers is referring the irrational bases of rationality, and as rationality being formed and reformed by/through critical reflection and investigation of the supposed irrational stuff. Accordingly, African mythologies which are supposed irrational and antagonistic to rationality could be the potential base of exploring African rationality.

Based on this, therefore, I think there is nothing incompatible in viewing rationality as particular and subjective in the African context while also valid in the objective form of rationality. It is the one authentically describing African thinking. What is wrong with European form of rationality is its exclusive nature: it sets forth one ideal of rationality, one set of truth and rules of action, to which all philosophical traditions must conform. In this process of stigmatizing its own values, modern European philosophy destroys others conceptions of rationality and humanity just as their modern science and religion do. Europeans present their singular humanity and rationality as unquestionably binding for other non-European humanity. This in fact is inaccessible, for every people's actual humanity and rationality is conceptualized out of their historicity and concrete life situation. It seems then that, exclusively presenting one form of rationality is either rejecting the existence of other forms of rationality, or challenging the possibility of cross-cultural dialogue between different canons of rationality.

Generally, what is required to be done in the African philosophy essentially and above all, is to have authentic concern for the depth of African reality. We have to sink back into the unreflective tradition for further reflection, and for therein lies African form of rationality and humanity which enable us to approach other canons of rationality. I am not, however, referring African traditions are rational and humanistic as they are, but though irrational, they are still the power house for exploring African form of rationality. I believe that, it is only by grasping the bases out of our lives, which is the way to attain the maximum of rationality. In other words, we

must engage in basic tasks of philosophizing which is the only way to recapture the authenticity of African rationality.

4.2 Particular and Objective Dimension of African Philosophy

Clearly identifying objective and subjective dimension of philosophy is a challenging task that continually recurs in philosophic inquiry in general and the African philosophy debate in particular. For this, most scholars prefer to describe the task of philosophizing as universal, objective, impersonal and disinterested inquiry than showing the clear-cut dimensions of it. In fact, what can be stated and noted about philosophy is nothing more than explaining its fundamental task. It is from this basic characteristic that we may be able to show its subjective manifestations. Accordingly, it is possible to identify the subjective manifestation of philosophy relying on its basic tasks or based on objective explanation given for philosophy in general. Philosophy, therefore, as an objective inquiry can split into a multiplicity of subjective manifestations such as African, Asian, and European, which are absolutely valid in the objective dimension— which can only be universal to all.

Moreover, insofar as philosophy and African philosophy are no longer understood antagonistically on the one hand, and the confusion of European philosophy for African can no longer endure on the other, what is needed to be done is to establish the unity of objective and subjective dimensions of philosophy following their separation. Indeed, it is crucial to critically examine the historicity of philosophy as both discourse and inquiry. It can be stated that since Karl Marx's new formulation of philosophy, scholars emphasized the task of looking for the unity of theory and practice. Philosophy for Marx above all is about the unity of theory and practice, and cannot be otherwise. This formulation of Marx, most importantly, is a philosophical turning point for most scholars' critic of African traditions, as failing to distinguish material causality from human agency, therefore responsible for African exclusion from the history of scientific thought (Masolo, 1995: 195). Accordingly, African scholars such as Hountondji, Wiredu, Bodunrin and Oruka, among others are those who demand the pragmatic role of philosophy in Africa. In fact, it is unfair to mention these scholars as the only examples, for the reason that this stand is obviously shared by the majority of African scholars. And yet, it is the incident that is being born with the modern meaning of philosophic inquiry. But, these scholars have showed us almost the same stand in seeing "the current revolutions in African thinking as a

parallel of the great intellectual revolution in Western revolution in the seventeenth century” (ibid, 194). Wiredu and Hountondji specifically demand African philosophy to dialectically relate to African reality and history. Additionally, they (if not others to the extent of Hountondji) criticize ethnophilosophy for being done on the old fashioned philosophical orientation, which according to them, has no pragmatic significance. They need African philosophy to be understood on the bases of rigorous science.

This stand in my opinion amounts to the view that, Africa needs neither metaphysics nor moral philosophy or its own epistemological categories. In their supposition, perhaps, such areas of philosophic inquiry are explored by the European philosophy so that it is insignificant for African philosophy looking for it. But, others are not agreeing with this supposition, and demand African philosophy to have its own metaphysical approach, moral thought and epistemological categories, or generally African thought system. In my supposition, the African people have, and need to have their own metaphysical and moral thought as equal as scientific thought. In fact, both *scientific based* and *ethnographic based* definition of African philosophy has undergone through various critics. And for this, African philosophy in the current situation is said to be at the new phase, or this antagonistic positions are more or less reconciled. Additionally, some promising paths have been indicated which have meaning to African historical and cultural experiences. But, still there is the continuity of philosophical misconception which I think African rationality to oscillate between different dichotomies. Above all, the either/or between two philosophic camps in my understanding is related to the problem of definition.

Accordingly, all the misconception in African philosophy debate is in identifying objective and particular instances of philosophic activity. As I have stated above, for Hountodji, Bodunrin Wiredu and Oruka or professional school in general, philosophy must be scientific, critical, reflective, systematic and instrumental. They are however criticized for echoing ‘European conception of philosophy’. In my opinion, these scholars rather state the objective dimension of philosophic inquiry. Because, those elements are objectively exercised by human being in general than as something to be ascribed to one group of human being. Accordingly, philosophy being African or European indicates the subjective practice of those objective elements. Nonetheless, the fatal mistake I think is, when and if either by European themselves or Africans, those objective human activities are identified as the only attributes of European philosophy.

Most importantly, our scholars' mistake lies in strictly using theoretical framework of Western philosophy for the African experience and expecting the same result.

For me, therefore, ascribing elements such as rationality, reflectivity and individuality to European whereas their opposite to Africa, is either for ideological reasons or for misconceptualizing the task of philosophy. The second alternative can be the possibility. Because, defining the so called "general philosophy" as critical, reflective, and systematic inquiry on the one hand, and ascribing these elements as the only attribute of one singular philosophic tradition on the other is paradoxical otherwise. As far as my understanding is concerned, neither Western nor African philosophy is singularly rational or irrational. It is the possibility that one particular group is exercised/exercising the objective dimension of philosophy than the others. But, it cannot be the criterion used to judge the forerunner as rational, and late beginner as irrational. Nor can it be universalized and idealized as binding and objectively valid for all others. Even, it is also controversial to assert one particular segment of humanity and rationality better than the other, for one might better succeed in technological advancement and material enrichment, while others in having or living happy life. In other words, exercising rationality is hardly judged as one being rational than the other, or as one group live humanely than the other, since success in one aspect of life reinforce the other.

Moreover, philosophy can only be understood as objective inquiry or activity which can subjectively be exercised in accordance with one's own historical and cultural particularity. It is only then that, philosophy is said to be experience, and experience can be rationally and critically investigated. Accordingly, when philosophy as objective inquiry is practiced empirically, and in the African context that objective dimension of philosophy is subjectively African. African humanity and rationality are subjective instances, through which African people are looking to the humanity of human being in general, or by which African humanity is examined in the light of humanity and rationality of human being. The same is true for European or Asian philosophy. Herein, thus, lies subjective dimension of philosophic activity. Despite this, as I have tried to show in the third chapter, European colonial discourses have represented their singular humanity and rationality as it is objectively valid for other non-European people. It is for its tendency of rejecting the humanity of humankind in general that Western form of rationality is criticized. For example, Joanna Overing who himself is a white puts his objection as follows

Western conception of humankind in its enthronement of reason cannot provide a firm bases from which we judge the capacities either of ourselves [Westerners] or of other human beings. (Quoted in Masolo, 1995: 191)

Generally, African philosophy as I have tried to assert in the above discussion can be viewed in two different but complementary ways: subjective and objective. In the former way, it is all about exploring and developing authentic form of African rationality and humanity. Accordingly, the beginning of African philosophy should be concrete experience of Africa from which therefore we objectively exercise philosophy questioning from our cultural situation. The second way, however, implies the subjectivity of African philosophy examined objectively, or concrete philosophizing in the light of objective manifestation. It is the way by which African philosophy is concerned with the horizons and forms within which philosophical contents in general can be established and through which humanity in general is visible. In this sense, all the subjective canons of rationality are pushed to the widest range of humanity in general. It is systematic and objective search for the standpoint from which humanity in general is surveyed. European conception of humanity cannot be objectively valid for the others. Here, the very notion of general philosophy by itself must not be understood as the valid standpoint by which other forms of humanity are judged, but the one within which every particular humanity is enclosed as in something absolutely inclusive. The conceptualization of “general philosophy” would put all the subjective forms as a whole under the objective conception.

4.3 Alternative Paths of Reclaiming Rationality (for Africa)

All the chained discussions up to now indicate that Europeans have appointed themselves over the meaning of reason to the extent of rejecting the humanity and rationality of other people i.e. Africans. It is this exclusive self-affirmation which African scholars have been reacting to. Accordingly, African response is said to be all the attempts of showing the lies, prejudices and biases of those European colonial discourses. As I have tried to indicate, those responses can't fully represent the African philosophy debate, but can represent one task among the many. This, however, is neither rejecting nor doubting the importance it may give to African philosophy. So validating and justifying their significance, I am arguing that African philosophy must be broadened in its scope to deal with different problems. For this reason, I am going to indicate the pathways within which reclaiming rationality is possible and African philosophy is more meaningful. Accordingly, the first two sections are the grounds which may provide the clue for

the points I am going to indicate in this section. My suggestion, however, is presupposed by none of the singular names of today's distinction of philosophy into analytic/continental or any other dichotomies. Because, I already asserted that contemporary dichotomization in philosophic inquiry is based on the authority of modern science, therefore, biased against universal conception of rationality and general philosophy. In other words, every dichotomy in contemporary philosophy is based on either the authority of the sciences or some ideological reasons. For this reason, they have no or little to do with basic and objective meaning of rationality. For this reason, the creative pathway of African philosophy lies in understanding basic meanings of Philosophizing. Insofar as my understanding is concerned, tracing philosophy to the foundation may enable us to attain so many things to address those challenges in the African philosophy debate. Hebermas for example asserted that "Today once again, reason can be defended only by way of a critique of reason" (Hebermas, 1981: vi). I personally accept this idea, for the fact that the cure for philosophical misconception is philosophy understood properly not otherwise.

Having asserted this, the creative path which I would like to suggest to be followed is *revolutionary approach* in two ways: in *deconstructing European exclusive conception of rationality*, and in *exploring and utilizing African form of rationality*. In fact, all ideas I have discussed up to now are the premises for what I think are the creative paths to be followed. Those paths which are included in my suggestion are perhaps those which are suggested by other scholars before me either directly or indirectly. But, still I have no doubt that my ways can be used as additional values to the practice of contemporary African philosophy. Above all, they are grounded on the basic meaning of philosophy from where I have tried to see the limitation of both camps. Both pathways indeed are the logical outcome of those philosophical misconceptions seen in both sides. For instance, what is required to be noted is that, this revolutionary movement can only be possible if and when fundamental tasks of philosophy in general and African philosophy in particular is clearly identified. Furthermore, this approach must be revolutionary, because it is the movement aimed at refuting European exclusive conception of rationality on the one hand, and exploring African form of rationality on the other. Most importantly, what must be known is the fact that both ways of revolutionary approach are geared towards the attainment of objective humanity.

The first approach for instance is aimed at refuting and displacing Europeans from their self-appointed standards of rationality and humanity. We have seen that, Europeans have exclusively claimed rationality and humanity to the extent of rejecting the humanity of others. Accordingly, it is logical for non-European people to reject this Europeans distortion of humanity and rationality. As African scholars such as Messay, Tsenay, Wiredu and others asserted, reaction to oppressive colonial discourse is the main theme of African philosophy. Based on this, therefore, African philosophy's response to Western discourses can be categorized under this revolutionary approach. Regardless of this, I can hardly accept that previous responses achieved their ultimate goal for at least the following reasons. First, most responses are highly emphasized on analyzing logical inconsistencies and fallacious reasoning prevailed in Western discourses on Africa. Here, I think they should supplement this by using pre-colonial African traditions. Second, they are not critical to each other's points of view as they used to refute oppressive ideas of Western discourses. In my opinion, just like those European discourses, African responses by themselves need another critical response. Indeed, insofar as philosophy is concerned to fight any kind of injustice to humanity, it is required to equally challenge injustice which has been made by Africans themselves. Thirdly, most of them respond from particular standpoint and bound to singular intellectual revolutions of the Occident tradition. Consequently, it is meant to avoid these weaknesses for which I need African responses to follow revolutionary approach.

For this purpose, however, the first important thing to do is being able to consider revolutionary approach of individualities in Western philosophy. As I have tried to indicate, ideas in European colonial discourses are not shared by all scholars, but the works of handful individuals astonished by European civilization and by those who are rationalizing the eighteenth century racism. For example, the works of individualities such as Nietzsche, Rousseau in particular and the ideas of postmodernism in general can be mentioned as those who questioned European exclusive rationality. Karl Jaspers put Nietzsche and Kierkegaard on the same position as the opponents of Western self-enclosed humanity in general and philosophical system in particular as it is clearly stated below

What is common to Nietzsche and Kierkegaard is that, both questioned reason from the depth of existenz. It is certainly not dogmatic scepticism; rather their whole thought strove toward a genuine truth. The questioning of every self-enclosed rationality which tries to make the whole truth communicable made both [Nietzsche and Kierkegaard] the

radical opponents of the system, that is, the form which philosophy had had for centuries and which had achieved its final polish in German idealism. (Jaspers, 1955: 25-26)

Not only this, both scholars as Jaspers puts “suspect truth in the naïve form of scientific knowledge” (ibid). Rousseau also uncovers philosophical biases in European discourses by critiquing the fundamental ideas in what they suppose universal humanity. The truth is, then, that neither Nietzsche nor Rousseau challenged European conception of rationality for being non-European people, but for seeing the danger it may cause to the conception of humanity in general. For this reason, I think it is important for us to be able to examine our revolutionary movement against European exclusive conception of humanity vis-à-vis those of revolutionary philosophical ideas in the Western intellectual life. In doing this, we may be able to incorporate the grounds from which their scholars question with that of our ‘revolutionary-deconstructing’ approach.

Moreover, the other way through which we may utilize Western intellectual revolution, however, is to critically investigate the context and the situation by which some intellectual revolutions have taken place. In fact, it is highly difficult to dissociate individual scholar from intellectual ideas at the occasion, but such separation will help us for different purposes. Mainly, individualist approach will help us differentiating philosophical approach of one scholar from the other while classifying intellectual life into different category will enable us to identify pertinent issues in each category. For my purpose, I want to use intellectual movements such as existentialism, contemporary debate in philosophy of science and postmodernism as an example. My concern however is just for showing the way these intellectual movements have incorporated some ideas of ancient Greek thinkers for challenging Eurocentric ideas in general and contemporary pseudo-scientific philosophizing in particular.

For example, existential philosophical movement incorporated some principal ideas (i.e. critical rationalism) and practices from the Greek antiquity. Unlike modern “pseudo-scientific philosophizing”——whose authority is limited to language analysis (in analytic philosophy in particular) and give concern for material fulfillment of human life, existentialism rather emphasizes on the totality of human life in the concrete existential situation. The same is true for the birth of philosophy of science, which was tempted to question the rationality of

(epistemological, methodological and conceptual categories) scientific inquiry by incorporating ancient Greek idea of critical rationality. Here, Karl Popper whose idea is believed to be revolutionary in modern philosophy of science incorporated “critical rationalism” of the Platonic time. Furthermore, postmodern scholars argue against Western culture based on “critical rationalism” by which they observe the impact of European normativity in many directions. From this, then, it is understandable that this intellectual movement does not simply promote Western values, but refuted and challenged it by incorporating most of the ideas from the ancient Greek philosophical practices. I can even say that, critical rationalism is the major discovery of those intellectual revolutions which help them to question value crises in the European modernity in general and scientific revolution in particular.

Based on the points I have mentioned above, therefore, it is logical to suggest that intellectual revolutions within the Western philosophy by itself can be used for our revolutionary approach, especially, for the following reasons. First, those intellectual movements indicate that the very meaning of both philosophy and rationality in the current situation is changed so that the European exclusive claim for reason is recent and purposive. Second, those revolutions reject European exclusive rationality which is synonymous with ours. In this case, what is to be noted is that those scholars reject for nothing than for it is European false consciousness, and for the impact it may have on the conception of humanity in general. Thus, in addition to non-Western reaction (external), those intellectual movements can be used as internal arsenal to reject the objectivity and universality of Occidental humanity. Third, since they are questioning the value-neutrality, thus, the validity of general philosophy and modern science, it is the indication that African philosophy needs to be redefined out of Africa’s own historicity and cultural situation. For this reasons, I think our revolutionary approach against European exclusive rationality can incorporate some important ideas from Western intellectual movements as well.

Moreover, the second revolutionary approach is toward exploring African form of rationality. I believe, this approach is more important than the former, for it is the essential task of African philosophy. The need for revolution is for most of the former approaches are equivocal and paradoxical. Accordingly, if we say rationality which is inherent to modern philosophy is “European biased gauge”, then it is necessary for other form to be provided as an alternative conception. For this, it is essential for other non-European people in general and Africa in

particular to enter into dialogue with Europeans, having their own form of rationality and humanity. As I have tried to discuss in the second section, the objective thinking is inherent to all human being regardless of geographical, racial, or sexual difference. Accordingly, African rationality or humanity is all about subjective manifestation of objective thinking in the African life experience. The same is true for Asian, American or European philosophy. Indeed, philosophical foundation of rationality for every philosophic tradition is their particular life situation so that no singular dimension of rationality is objectively valid for the remaining others.

In fact, the African philosophy debate in general and rationality claim in particular is believed to be all the tasks attempted to explore African form of rationality and humanity. But, I can hardly accept that it was/is as revolutionary as it has to. Because, the historicity of African philosophy shows as if those debates oscillated between different dichotomies and oppositional ideas. Ethnophilosophy viewed African rationality as something unique and different whereas professional school surrenders this objective task toward western philosophy. Additionally, members of the hermeneutic philosophy are trying to confine the subject of African study to postcolonial situation while the nationalist school tended towards uncritical foundationalism. For this reasons, we can say that the debate in fact is held equivocally. Masolo also explained this when he described the history of African philosophy as a search for self-identity. Despite these orientational paradoxes, we can say that nowadays some promising tasks have been done and African scholars are also philosophizing in a stable situation. But, insofar as some paradoxes are still continued, and yet, exploring African rationality has not yet been achieved maximally, it needs to be revolutionary.

Furthermore, the other reason for which I need African philosophy to be revolutionary is for the fact that, African scholars are reluctantly concerned with exploring African rationality. As it is clearly stated by Wiredu, Hountondji, Masolo, Irele and others, European anthropological studies are highly concerned with providing the ground for European colonialism than studying anthropological findings as they were supposed to be. For Wiredu, “they were narrative and interpretative but, as a rule, not evaluative except indirectly. Their main aim was to explain, largely to foreigners, how Africans lived by their ideas”. (2004: 2) Based on this, therefore, in my opinion those narratives describe African people as “pagan” not for Africans having no religion at all, but for religious thought in Africa is not monotheistic as that of Christianity.

Moreover, those studies used Western epistemological standards to describe and evaluate African thought system in general. However, as far as my understanding is concerned, difference is only difference which might exist in between two thought system without applying oppressive conceptual frameworks. In this case, the difference between Western and African thought system in general and religion in particular shows different ways of approaching reality. But, the problem arises when and if one is characterized as superior than the other applying oppressive conceptual frameworks. Regardless of this deliberate oppression on the European side, however, we can take it also as the weakness of African tradition in general and African scholar in particular. Because, it is unarticulated nature of African indigenous thought which exposed them for easy oppression. And, the task of articulation and organizing African thought system is no one else's than our scholars. For example, religions such as Buddhism, Shintoism, Taoism and Hinduism resisted and survived the challenges of Christianity and Islam for having well-articulated doctrines. The same is true for the thought systems of China, India and Japan. For me, the tasks of organizing, documenting and articulating African thought system is all about facilitating the ground for the exploration of African rationality. If not, it can be taken as the weakness of our scholars themselves, even a fatal mistake if we need other peoples' thought to give us African rationality. Regardless of this, however, why the religious of Africans are Christianity or Islam still needs to be studied. For example, Ezekiel Gabbisa in studying the encounter of Macca Oromo with Evangelical Christianity argued that conversion is not imposition. He said,

In the case of the Macca Oromo, I argue, conversion denotes the emergence of a variant of Christianity which I characterize as a blend of what European Protestant missionaries found in Oromo religion to be acceptable and what Oromos found in Protestant Christianity to be compatible with their indigenous religion. (Gabbisa, 2013, 119)

In fact, it is hardly accepted that two different religions can coexist without any distortion. But, I do have a reservation for Ezekiel's finding since he is not arguing at the doctrine level, but only argues conversion as value exchanges. I also believe that, whether Africans are converted to Christianity or Islam, each religion is manifested in the thought system of African people, or the principle of that particular religion might be understood by each convert associating with her/his previous practices. Admitting all the challenges revolving around the originality of African thought system, I believe that our scholars approach towards our traditions should be critical and

revolutionary. Consequently, studying and promoting fundamental values of the African thought system in general is apt to the African scholars.

Based on this, therefore, what I can understand by African rationality is the totality of African thought systems which subscribe both post and pre-colonial situation. In other words, African philosophy must not be unconcerned about the question of African rationality, for our rationality lies in African morality, in African religion, or generally in the supreme value of black humanity. Accordingly, as long as our concern is philosophizing out of African lived experiences, our rationality is our value through which we may approach reality. And still, once rationality is central to humanity, and humanity by extension is objective and universal to all group of human being, there is no way by which European humanity is ideally standardized for Africa. Nor can also be any justification for African values denigrated as something irrational and insignificant. Consequently, our philosophy is all about the exploration of our rationality, and our rationality is our humanity by which we may exercise thinking as objective to humanity.

Generally, as long as our discussion is concerned rationality can be described as indispensable element of two independent but interdependent terms: humanity and philosophizing. Based on this distinction, the possibility of reclaiming rationality for Africa is in both ways either: in the *abstract* sense and *pragmatic* sense. Accordingly, rationality claim in the first sense is all about the validation of African humanity. This however is a negation of Eurocentric central idea or a rejection of ideas indorsed in European colonial discourses on Africa. As we have seen, colonial narratives on Africa in general and black people in particular denied the humanity and rationality of Africa for, and out of nothing than racism. For this reason, reclaiming in the abstract sense is all about rejecting European fallacious ideas on the one hand and reaffirming the humanity of Africans on the other. This, however, is not asking Europeans to return us back which they previously denied to us or withhold. But, it is about reaffirming something which is intrinsically found within us that no one can neither confer nor withhold. Reason has no color, but it is the insight inherent to humanity. In other words, rationality lies not in our skin color so that there is neither white nor black rationality, but the one which is intrinsic to humankind. It seems then that, rationality claim in the abstract sense as Ramose asserted is “the assertion and reaffirmation of inalienable right to reason” (2002: VI).

The rationality claim in the pragmatic sense, however, is all about the concretization of what is consciously validated at the abstract sense. As we can infer from those European discourses, African mentality is supposed to be non-philosophic and irrational. Although European racist scholars are promulgating their superiority complex that is built on false consciousness, I think our rationality which is abstractly validated must also have meaning to our concrete life-situation. In other words, for as long as philosophizing is all about particularly exercising objective thinking, then African philosophy is nothing less than concretizing our rationality. It is only then that we can say, African insight validated transcendently is realized practically. Nonetheless, although human insight is objective, it is said to be different when and once subjectively exercised in different life-situation. African rationality is bound to African horizons of space and time. In relation to this, in as far as African philosophy is exercising objective rationality in African particular experience; it is not required for the African philosophy to be similar with Western philosophy. The possibility is dialogue and communication in between the two philosophical traditions. And still, this is not for assimilation of one particular experience into the other, but only communicating over objective humanity accepting each other's difference. Herein, therefore, lies the issue of African language, morality, religion, science and others in African philosophy which are believed to be issues related with the question of particularity. Consequently, concretization of objective rationality should be able to address, if not, attempt to address issues revolving around African particularity.

Conclusion

Though there are issues that lie beyond the scope of this paper, I have tried my best to provide and discuss questions which are related to rationality claim in African philosophy. Indeed, I have tried to approach questions of African philosophy debate in general and rationality debate specifically from different critical points of view. The first one is, Afrocentric scholars' approach from historical points of view. I also realize the significance of approaching African philosophy from historical points of view. But, the grounds from where they are trying to appeal make me critical of their arguments in two main points. First, they try to generalize the particularity of ancient Egyptians for the whole continent without providing any substantial evidence (except Bernal), and even, to the extent of affecting other African cultures remain unconcerned and

unstudied. Here, it seems to me that those works are conducted for ideological self-defense than for purely academic purposes. Second, they constructed new and unusual image of Africa which I believe is hardly accepted vis-à-vis realities in the current situation. And still, the way they portrayed ancient Africa in general and ancient Egyptian in particular is also challenged by Eurocentric scholars such as Mary Lifkowitz by taking their allegation as Pseudo-history. Because of these challenging questions, I think generalizing the particularity and historicity of ancient Egyptian for the whole continent is unconvincing, and cannot be the correct direction for contemporary tasks of African philosophy.

The second way through which I have approached rationality claim is confined to postcolonial academic-based African philosophy debate which involves two interdependent tasks: responses to Western discourses on the one hand and exploring African form of rationality on the other. Accordingly, pertinent issues in this debate are related to; European colonial narratives on Africa, African response to those discourses and rationality debate. In fact, these three concepts are explained and understood in relation to each other. On the one hand, European colonial narratives are related to colonial scholarship and intellectual movement in the European modernity. As I have tried to indicate, those narratives are merely promulgating the wish that only the Occident segment of humanity has the exclusive right to reason by describing non-Western people as the negative others of rationality. African responses, however, are anti-thesis to Eurocentric thesis in a sense that, their fundamental task is to refute Eurocentric conception of rationality and humanity on the one hand, and reasserting and validating historically excluded humanity of Africa on the other. It is in relation to this either/or that the rationality debate is instigated in philosophic inquiry. The rationality debate, therefore, is critical examination of European conception of rationality. But, what is central to this debate is the ambiguous and ambivalent conception of reason/rationality. It is said to be the Europeans' exclusive conception of reason, which presented rationality as characteristic feature of humanity on the one hand and as only white people are rational on the other. It is understandable then that, intellectual movements of non-Western philosophy in general and African philosophy in particular are by far engaged in anti-European conception of reason.

Moreover, as far as my concern is African philosophy, it is true that all African philosophical works are challenging and questioning this European exclusive conception of rationality. And

yet, those responses are justified since rationality is an indispensable element of both humanity and philosophizing. Most importantly, it is said to be as a result of African scholars' long standing reaction to disparaging European discourses that African philosophy nowadays is at promising chapter. Regardless of this fact, however, it is evident that African responses in particular and philosophy debate in general are marked by equivocal orientation. Because, attempting to reject Eurocentric ideas on the one hand and strictly relying on epistemological standards of Eurocentrism on the other are paradoxical and untenable. Indeed, despite some handful works, we can say that most previous attempts were paradoxical in their approach. It is having understood this philosophical paradox, for which I need African philosophy to follow a revolutionary approach: for deconstructing Europeans exclusive conception of rationality as well as for exploring African form of rationality. I think one approach cannot be seen isolated from the other so that one is complementary to the other. Consequently, for refuting the self-inclusive conception of European rationality as well as for exploring African rationality, it is indispensable to exercise thinking objectively. Thus, neither displacing nor exploration revolutionary approaches are possible without thinking critically. We need to critically look back to our philosophical traditions just like we critically approach others.

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